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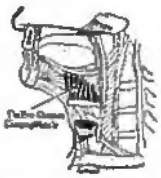

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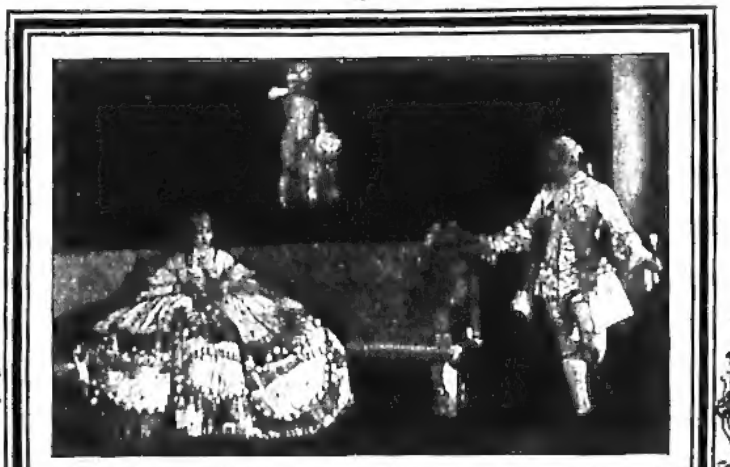

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VOL. 1, NO. 4 JANUARY, 1925

The Frontier

HARRY E. MAULE, Editor

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JAMES B. HENDRYX

A Story of the Old Cattle Days

The Winning of Cincinnati McQueen

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A WHITE MAN'S HERITAGE — *L. Patrick Greene*
Pioneering in Rhodesia

THE BETTER BREED — *Edward P. Ware*
The Arkansas Sunken Land Country

RED KNIVES — *Ernest Haycox*
Indian Days in the Northwest Territory

ON THE TRAIL OF SINDBAD THE SAILOR
by Talbot Mundy
When the White Men came to the Dark Continent

Also Short Stories by
JAMES K. WATERMAN
BARRY SCOBEE
and others

Ready For You on January 20th

CHEROKEE STRIP

BY HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

I HAD an old hoss and a buckboard too,
Bill had an old tent that the rain came through;
When they toted the horn and fired the gun,
Oh, my gosh, how the crowd did run!

Yes, the crowd broke loose at a thunderin' clip,
All lookin' for land in the Cherokee Strip.

Oh, the air was alive with hoofs and wheels,
Buggies and buckboards, grunts and squeals,
Studs and geldings, mares and foals,
Burros and mules and prairie-dog holes.

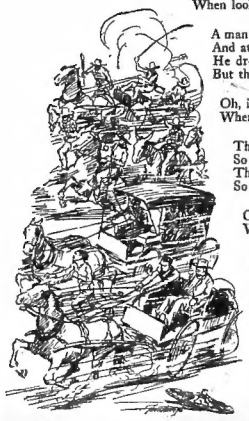
Oh, it's hang to your hat and let her rip,
When lookin' for land in the Cherokee Strip.

They trotted and loped, they flew, they hopped,
And some kept on and some they stopped;
Some lost a wheel and some got throwed,
For the crowd was wild and they weren't no road.

Oh, it's lash your load and clinch your grip,
When lookin' for land in the Cherokee Strip.

We got a bad start for our hoss was slow,
And bein' behind we seen the show,
The best land staked and the poor land took,
And nothin' for us but a good long look.

Oh, it's pack your turkey for a hungry trip,
When lookin' for land in the Cherokee Strip.



A man on foot came shufflin' past,
And at that our old hoss breathed his last;
He dropped plumb dead, so we looked around,
But there weren't one foot of un-took ground.

Oh, it's watch your step that your foot don't slip,
When lookin' for land in the Cherokee Strip.

Then we seen a man on some land he'd staked,
So doggone tired that he never waked,
The sun went down and the light was dim,
So we raised our tent right over him.

Oh, it's watch the wind when you light your dip,
When lookin' for land in the Cherokee Strip.

Then Bill he shouts right in his ear,
"Whose usin' our tent when we ain't here?"
The man jumps up and his face gits white,
Says he, "I reckon my head ain't right!"

Oh, there's nothin' like nerve and a good stiff lip,
When lookin' for land in the Cherokee Strip.

Bill he wunk at me and he pulled his gun,
And he says, "Now see how your laigs can run";
So the stranger left like to catch a train,
And the storm came down and our tent leaked rin.

MICKY MALONE FROM SAN ANTONE

By CLEM YORE

Author of "Easy Goin' of the Box Plumb Bob"

Double-crossed by men he had trusted, and pursued by reward-notices spread broadcast by a vengeful sheriff, Micky sped into the desert—and into the rustlers who were harrassing the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S

THERE is no country in the world so dry as West Texas when it's dry; and when it's wet——

Gumbo, slush and the downpour of rain, rain, rain!

It almost seems, at such a time, as if the sun had never shone, would never, could never shine again. All that humanity can do is to stick in it, on it, to it; and that region breeds the stickingest strain of man-animal one could meet with. Some say these hombres were dropped to the earth as water-puppies and, because of iodine in the drinking water, were changed into salamanders. Nevertheless, it takes a forty-five slug to salivate one of them. Rain won't do it.

West Texas was wet and it was raining in Sweetwater.

Back in a corral shed behind the Dodge City Trail Exchange, a tall, rangy, golden chestnut stood head down, its woven cinches loosened; its bridle hanging to the horn, while its rider was inside the resort whiling away hard-earned *pesos* in the time-eating game of five-card stud. He was trying, that boy.

He was a fine, upstanding chap of twenty-four or five, with a pair of clear, deep-sea blue eyes that looked a man squarely, fearlessly in the face. His neck and hands were tanned a clear brown, but his skin, where it showed, where his shirt lay open at the throat, was like that of a child, white, clear and of fine texture. His voice was soft and hidden in it, somewhere, was a suggestion of Ireland.

Bad luck had clung to him like the rain, and he was three hundred dollars in the hole, due, primarily, to uttering that poker melancholy, "That's good," too many times. Then——

It all came about in the twinkling of an eye. No one knew just how or exactly when, as several testified before the coroner's jury the next day. The young man, whom they called Micky, had bet fifty dollars on his third card, which paired queens, in sight. Sam Sutter, the dealer, a rat-faced, slim-built, ex-camp cook and horse wrangler, suddenly distracted the play by laughing at a man who was cussing his luck because he had exposed a buried-card. During the semi-twitter which passed around the table, a little-finger shift was neatly executed by Sutter.

"Cards, boys," he yelled, snapping the pack. "Out they come!"

"Put that deck back where it came from," ordered the youth, a snap to his voice like a barn-door slamming in the wind.

"Are y'u loco, Micky?"

"Put it back, I tell you!"

"Do you mean to insinuate?"

"That's too mild a word, Sam; I'm saying that you made a shift after the cut. I saw you, and I can put my finger on the top card that ought to come off first."

The deck fell; the dealer's right hand dropped from sight as he reached for something under the table. But even then there was no move from Micky Malone. Not until the hidden gun appeared in full sight of all did the crashing roar of his sixshooter split the quiet of the room even as that of the gambler's gun. A blue veil of acrid-smelling smoke drifted head-high, from the muzzle of Micky's gun, half-tilted above the table, in his left hand. The dealer slid off his chair in a fit of pitiful coughing.

"Keep your seats, men!"

Micky jumped to his feet, swung his gun about and addressed the owner of the place, now standing looking on at the scene, paralyzed with fear, both hands on the bar top.

"I'm wanting what he filched from me, just three hundred and fifty of that bank, Ed," said Micky. "That's exactly the count; do I get it?"

"Seems like y'u shore do. Count it out, Pete," and the proprietor spoke to an assistant, who shoved the money across the table to Micky and watched it as it disappeared in a chaps pocket.

Then Micky backed away to a side door and motioned a young puncher to follow him.

"Watch that door, Tex," he said, as they went outside, "while I slip the bridle on my pony. It's not another barking of my gun that I'm wanting to listen to."

"Boy," replied Tex, "we all knew somethin' was a-goin' to come off yere, this P. M. They been a-layin' for y'u eveh since y'u cut out them calfs ag'in the loadin'-tally on Sam's brother. That piece of work hurt this gang and the brand-inspector's sure combin' oveh their bunch. Y'u'll have to ride wet a long time to get away from this; but it's a good thing John ain't in town. Without him there won't be any posse a-followin' y'u. Whicha way y'u headin'?"

"West—always west, where there ain't no steel rails and you can't see wire and there is a decent breed o' men. Heaven knows I didn't want to drill that *hombre*—I gave him more than an even break, didn't I?"

"Y'u bet, an' then some. Keep on a-goin' till y'u come to nothin' but cookin'-stove brands. Out thata way, where a brand plasters a whole side of a cow, y'u'll find a set of men that just natcherly hates all this yere country. They still think it's all Tom Green County yet, with one sheriff an' a deputy keepin' the law an' order."

"Tell them," commented Micky, as he led out his horse and let down the bars, "that I'm pushing out because I can't get nothing but a bottom-of-the-deck deal in this county."

"Y'u're daid right. With Sam's brother sheriff, what chance has y'u got with a jury such as he'd pick? When y'u ride by my place tell my old woman to give y'u that box of shells on the kitchen-shelf alongside the java-can; they'll fit that saddle-gun y'u're a-packin'."

"*Adios!*" and Micky tore out of the corral.

Events followed as Tex said they would; the town waited to take action until Sam's brother should arrive. Micky went his way unmolested.

As he dashed alongside the railroad track, four miles from town, toward a small junction point, he saw a girl sitting under the platform shed waiting for a train which had just whistled for the station. Throwing his reins over a hitching-rack, he walked to the ticket window and sent a wire to Captain Stuart of San Antonio. In it he told of the shooting and said that if the chief of the Ranger force would guarantee a fair trial, in some other county than Nolan, he would return. He designated the *Express* personal column as the medium by which to inform him of a compliance with his terms.

The agent looked dumbfounded, but accepted the silver coin in payment for the wire and slammed down the window just as the rumble of the train was heard.

Micky walked from the waiting-room and was about to pass the girl when he saw a large centipede drop from the shed roof and fall upon her thin lace collar, close to her neck.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said quietly, "there's something ugly on your shoulder." As she turned her face toward him he quickly picked off the wriggling mass of poisonous legs and flung it to the platform.

"Oh," shrieked the girl, "a centipede!"

"Yes, miss," Micky smiled, staring

calmly into her wide eyes. "He was a discriminating little jigger; he had the two of us to drop on and he picked you."

"Thank you," she answered with a shudder. "I have a perfect loathing and terror for creepy things." Then, as the train rolled in, "Oh, I wish I had time to thank you properly, but I live in New Mexico, and I'll probably never see you again. Anyway, I wish I knew your name."

"They calls me Micky Malone from San Antone," he said, "but, I'm a-thinking you'll not be able to locate me with a letter for a while."

"Why?"

"Because I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way."

"Oh!"

"But would you mind giving me the name of you?"

"It's Mazie—Mazie Buchanan."

"That's mighty fine," he said. "It's the likes of me that's never forgetting a face, and I won't be a-forgetting that name." Again he smiled and she thought the expression a bit wistful.

When the train pulled away from the station she watched him as he rode, high in his saddle, his slicker showing a golden yellow against the drab background of the cloudy sky.

EN days later Micky Malone rode up to a small town on the International Border and the first sight that met his gaze, as he dismounted before a general store and saloon, was a reward placard bearing a reproduction of his photograph and a description of his person, as well as the crime for which he was wanted.

When he walked to the bar and asked for a drink, a tall, stoop-shouldered old man arose from a chair tilted against a wall and sauntered carelessly outside. While Micky drank his beverage and was buying some groceries, the aged rancher stole a glance at the poster and read it with a knowing smile.

$1000 REWARD $1000
MICKY MALONE
KILLER

Six feet tall; weight one hundred eighty-five; light blue eyes and blond, thick hair, inclined to wave; Irish descent and talks with a slight brogue and walks with a springy, nervous gait. This man is a champion rider and bulldogger; of clean habits; not given to heavy drinking, and is an excelent cowhand. Great care must be used in making his apprehension as he is lightning-fast with a gun in either hand and shoots equally well from the holster, at any angle, on foot or in the saddle. He's fond of bucking-horse contests and bulldogging events.

Then followed a false account of the killing of Sam Sutter.

It was signed by John Sutter, Sheriff, Nolan County, Texas.

After stuffing his purchases in his saddle-pockets Micky stepped into his saddle and rode away. The idea of seeing his own face in the little, sequestered frontier town seemed to amuse rather than to awe him; a smile grew upon his lips and as he rode he sang softly.

"When Irish eyes are smilin',
Sure, it's like a day in spring;
To the lilt of Irish laughter,
Y'u can hear the angels sing.
When Irish hearts are happy,
All the world seems bright and gay;
And, when Irish eyes are smilin',
Sure, they steal your heart away."

The sound of a horse loping lightly back of him made him turn about in the saddle. He recognized the smiling face of the old man he had seen outside of the store.

"Howdy," greeted the man genially, reining in his horse.

"Good day, sir," returned Micky. "'Tis leagly weather you have in these parts."

"Un-huh, they's plenty weather yere. Nice hoss y'u're a-ridin' an' he has lots of bottom, that baby."

"There you said it; I raised him from a colt. Pretty good strain, too; got some Arabian in him."

"Crossin' the line?"

"No, sir; I'm jest a-moseying along, hoping to drop onto a job of riding down here. Lots of country for cows?"

"Yes, an' real hands is scarce; an' the pay's right good. Forty-five, an' all y'u c'n eat."

"Sounds fine. I'm a-wondering where."

"I'm runnin' the Triple X, about seven miles from yere. Wanta come over an' have supper? Maybe y'u'd jest nacherly fall in with my boys an' like the outfit.

She's hot an' dry in spells of about twelve months a year, but mighty fine country for a top-hand to get ahead in."

"Triple X? Do you burn 'em on both sides?"

"Yep. I wanta see my cows anywhere, any time, all ways."

Then Micky recalled what Tex had told him.

"If you ain't a-minding then," he said swiftly, "I'll be accepting your invitation to grub. Tomorrow I'll throw in with the Triple X."

That night, after supper, as Micky sat telling stories in the bunkhouse, the rancher came to the door and called the foreman outside and took him into the main building.

"Read that," he said, spreading out the reward notice. "I pulled that down from the bulletin-board on Ned's porch."

Hurriedly scanning the poster, the foreman raised his eyes and a smile spread over his features.

"What's on your mind, except your hair?" he asked.

"I was a-thinkin' that maybe this kid might have been sent to us by the Lord Almighty."

"To do what?"

"Make a good Mexican out of Pablo Sanchez."

"Do you think——?"

"Don't it say he's lightnin' fast with a gun? Didn't I come from that country an' didn't I know them Sutters? I'm a-tellin' y'u they never sends a thousand after a man unless that man's thirteen to the dozen better'n they are; an' John Sutter's fast hisse'f. This Pablo, now——"

"Go on, discharge your other barrel," the foreman urged.

"They's a rodeo down at Victoria, when?"

"In two weeks. Pablo's goin' to bring over a lot o' greaser riders from Chihuahua and they say the cows he'll have for ropin' an' bulldoggin' is just hell-a-tootin' man-eaters, plumb."

"Then y'u slides down thata way in about a week an' let some of Pablo's friends know that I've hired this kid to keep my calf crop entire an' complete; an' that he's a smoke-eater. Spread it on thick. Then, the night of the rodeo's first day, when all th gals is crazy over this boy, let Carmencita make a play for him, in Andy's place; an' send word to Pablo. That'll touch off the pin-wheels, an', if I ain't missin' gradin' Micky, they'll be a spade slappin' sand over Pablo the very next day."

"Looks Jake! Sure does!" the foreman agreed. "Seems like Good Luck sashayed right up an' buried her haid in our lap. Tomorrow I'll take the boys out on the Mesquite Flats an' I'll see can this kid shoot. Then I'll let y'u know. We sure don't want to get him killed; seems like a right nice sort o' feller."

THE next night Shorty Glover, the foreman, went to the ranch-house and closeted himself with Old Man Massey.

"Y'u don't have to worry about Pablo hu'tin' him," he said, by way of opening conversation. "Saw all he had today; an' he's up and up, slick an' slender, with his iron—shore is."

"Tell me about it," Massey ordered.

"Well, we putters around mendin' fence all mornin', an' then goes to Smith Spring for lunch. While we's sittin' around chinnin' an' smokin', I throws out a empty can of green-gage plums an' kicks it in the bottom with a forty-five slug. Bugs Smith knocks it sidewise an' Hank Hudnut flattens it plumb, while it's in the air."

"'Mighty good shootin',' comments Micky, an' I sees my chance. 'Y'u ain't wearin' two of 'em just to weight y'u down, is y'u?' I asks, an' he smiles. 'Got any tricks?' I says. 'One or two,' he says. Then he gets up, puts two half eggs shells on two piles of sand, bends down with his guns stuck a-tween his legs, beads 'em on them egges an' holds them muzzles just so. 'Any time y'u boys say to pull the trigger, I'll break the egg-shells. 'Four-bit, y'u don't,' Hank lets out. 'Taken,' says Micky, 'y'u calls the time, Hank.' An' Hank did, just thirty seconds later by his own watch. Both shells just nacherly lit out an' vamoosed. I wish y'u'd 'a' seen them boys! The next thing he did was to spin a rope an', when he got the loop just so, I flung another can in the air an' he busted it twice, an' that spinnin' rope was a jerkin' up an' down, up an' down, so fast y'u c'u'dn't see it. I never see nobody else but Frank Miller at Fort Collins do that air trick."

"Them's stunts, his hobbies—but is he fast?" Massey wanted to know.

"Wait a minute, y'u ain't heered nothin' yet. I took a box out o' the wagon an' it

measured just thirty inches square; an' I set it up at thirty-five yards. Then each of us fellers toed a mark, pulled our gun, an' at a go-signal emptied six shots apiece in that box; I was a-holdin' my stop on ev'ry man."

"What did he do it in?"

"He uncorked six slugs, outa that left-hand old frontier single-action of his'n, in a fraction less'n two seconds; an' the gun never come out the leather. He's got his irons hung on swivels, an' they're fast, that's what I means; chain-lightning lead-slingers."

"That's enough."

"But he put all six inside that box so fine a duck c'u'dn't flew across it without gettin' mussed up," the foreman added.

"Accurate, eh?"

"He's as sure as taxes, cool as snake-liver, gentle as a dove, hawg-wild when he wants to be, an' the ding-dangin'est best-lookin' kid I've seen in this country. Pablo won't sell any more of our beef in Juarez; that's a cinch."

"All right, y'u get the cold-deck ready an' when y'u go to town tomorrow, y'u tell Carmencita how good-lookin' this hombre is. Plant the seeds, Shorty, right now; she'll talk, an' Pablo'll hear it dead certain. Do some braggin' an' drink-buyin'."

"Listen, that's Micky a-singing now. Say, he's gotta right fine tenor voice. I reckon we c'u'd get up a quartette, now."

Mick was singing an Irish ballad, "I'm In Love Today."

" 'Round the fire my mither, dear,
Ye taught me songs to sing,
And whispered charmin' words to me
Of the joys that love would bring.
Oh, sure, ye taught me lovin',
As ye wiped my tears away,
And now ye can't be blamin' me,
For I'm in love today.

"Oh, she's a lovely lady,
As the likes o' ye can tell,
But why on earth she's lovin' me,
The likes o' me can't tell.
Her smile is captivatin',
She's the divil in her eye,
So, Mither, I'm in love today
And shall be till I die."

Old Man Massie's eyes swam with tears. Out in the yard, behind the bunkhouse, the cowpunchers lolled around on the earth, listening to the song, and their cigarettes, fading and glowing in the shadows, looked for all the world like a cluster of fireflies.

II

THE flags of Mexico and the United States were fluttering everywhere; the grandstand was filled and the picturesque costumes of Mexican vaqueros and American cowboys glittered in the arena; the band was making martial music, and the bawling of angered steers came from the pens and chutes.

Micky had successfully ridden in the bucking horse contest, and was now waiting his turn beside some of his boys for the announcement that would send him down the field to bulldog his steer. Pablo Sanchez, dressed like a bull-fighter, in green and red silk-velvet, leaned against the base of the judges' stand, a cynical smile on his face, a fiendish light in his eyes; he was watching some hands prod a vicious steer against a gate.

"Hey, you, Irish Kid," sang out one of the judges; it was under this name that Micky had now become known. "C'm over yere."

Mick rode up to the stand.

"Instructions," explained the judge. "The 'dead-line' is sixty feet from the chute an' bulldogger an' hazer will be allowed to leave the gate with the steer. Y'u can lap an' tap yore cow at the white-wash, but if y'u touches him with yo're hands before the animal crosses the line y'u're penalized ten seconds. Time starts when the flag is dropped, an' this happens when the steer's two front feet cross the mark. Bulldogger must leave horse an' catch steer in sixty seconds or yo're try is two minutes. A pistol shot will tell y'u when yore time's up. Are y'u ready?"

Micky smiled.

"Horn-locking in the ground barred?" he asked.

Pablo sneered.

"Break his neck if you can," he shot. "This ain't no Humane Society meet."

"I was just a-wanting to know," returned Micky.

"Y'u've got the rules, Kid," said the judge. "All y'u gotta do is throw yore cow that away an' hold it till the judge tells y'u to let the critter up."

"I understand."

Pablo caught Micky's eyes as he turned from the stand and he felt them sink deep into his. He did not like the look the

handsome gringo gave him. It conveyed utter scorn.

A boy hurried to Micky's side and presented him with a huge bunch of flowers.

"From a beautiful lady," he said, bowing, "as a token of good luck."

Micky raised the blossoms to his lips, doffed his large hat and rode away hugging the good-luck emblem to his side; Pablo swung around and saw a girl, leaning far out of a lower box, her mouth partly opened, a strange and hungry expression on her face. The pupils of his eyes contracted fiercely.

"What steer's that, coming out now," he asked a passing chute-hand.

"Big Blue," replied the Mexican, "and he is flowing blood at the eyes; he's that mad. Death is not far from that gringo, now."

Pablo drew out his cigarette papers and deftly rolled a smoke. Micky, with Hank, his hazer, was riding toward the gate behind which a dust cloud was being kicked up by an infuriated steer whose diabolical bawls were rending the air hideously. The band had ceased playing; every eye was strained upon the far end of the field. The arena-boss shouted a command, the gate to the chute flew open and men scrambled to the top rails of nearby corrals; then came the maddened beast, head down, tail flowing straight out. Hank rode close to it, shouting and making all manner of noise at its head. Micky bent low over his saddle, his chestnut loping, neck and neck, with the wild beast. Then——

Out of the corner of his eye Micky saw the flag drop; the steer had crossed the dead-line and was now his game. With a pressure of the off-knee he gave his pony the signal and the cool animal, racing at full speed, leaned slightly to one side. Micky leaped, landing on the neck of the maddened brute and catching both horns at the same time. Instantly, a cloud of dust arose; the beast fell; Micky's horse stopped and turned around; and Micky shouted, "Time!" A bellow of exultation arose from the stand.

Judges, who had stationed themselves somewhat farther down the field, now hurried in a mad gallop to the scene.

"I got his time," sang out one." Where's the timer?"

"Here! What'd y'u catch it at?"

"Nine seconds!"

"Right!"

"Let him up," yelled a judge, "an' everybody scatter. That devil is riled, now. Get ready with them ropes, y'u men."

"Y'u won't need nary a rope," laughed Hank, "cain't y'u see them horns is locked under him an' clinched in the ground?"

It was true; Micky had thrown his steer by twisting a horn to the earth and allowing its momentum to subjugate the beast. This style of bulldogging was not permitted in other contests in which he had entered, but the fierceness of the stock at Victoria had waived this rule. The unbelievable had happened; Pablo had seen his worst animal handled as though it had been a sucking calf. He turned and left the arena and walked behind the box in which he saw Carmencita, eyes aflame, lips smiling, her tiny hands clenching the rail behind which she sat with a bevy of dance-hall girls.

"Because you sent him the flowers, *chiquita*," he whispered in her ear, "he rides for the last time this afternoon."

The girl turned around so abruptly that her mantilla flecked his hair.

"Huh," she shot, a sudden pallor spreading her face, "they say, señor, that this blue-eyed man, who rides like a cavalier, is much faster with a gun than he is at taming your old cows. Ha, ha, boys like you should not talk so big, when there are men around." Her eyes literally flashed loathing.

The others tittered and Pablo left the grandstand.

Micky rode to the judges and was officially given his time; then he turned and dashed up to the box.

"To whom am I indebted for the flowers which carried me to luck?" he asked.

"It was Carmencita," cried a girl.

"You have honored me," smiled Carmencita, leaning toward him. "If Señor Irish Keed will come to the place called The Blue Parrot, I will sing him a song and dance with him. I will go to my work when the clock strikes nine. You will be there?" She spoke to him softly in Spanish.

"Ma'am," stammered Micky, "'tis a long time from four in the afternoon until nine of the night; much water can run under bridges by that time."

"I, too, shall hate the rest of the day till then," said the dancer, tearing a rose from her breast, kissing it, and tossing it gracefully to him.

"I warn you," he said, "I may step on your slipper."

"What matters a slipper, when the heart flames with fire?" she answered.

Then Hank came and pulled Micky away.

THE town was ablaze, that night, with ribbons of Japanese lanterns, arcs of burning Greek-fire, brilliantly lighted windows, and streets jammed with a nondescript mass of humanity always on the move, good-natured and filled with song.

Down at the drinking place of Enrique Mateo a small group of *vaqueros* sat around Pablo Sanchez, who was disconsolately drinking *aguardiente* and waiting for someone.

Someone who was to come and bring him tidings of the girl and the spawn of the north, the gringo devil who had ridden his horses as though they were fat mares and thrown his cows as though they were sheep. Pooh! The foal of scum!

The door was flung open and with it came a rush of distant sound and a swarthy cheeked young rider covered with the white dust of the desert. His eyes looked like black buttons behind his whitened lashes; his teeth like the unripe seeds of melons. He darted to Pablo.

"Well," said Sanchez, "what news?"

"They will be here, sixty of them, fully armed and at nine o'clock. I told them to wait for us down by Cottonwood Spring. Was that not right?"

"*Ah!* you did well."

"And on my way back, as I crossed the railroad at Dead Mule Spring and I came upon the platform of the loading-pens for the sheep country, I saw this tacked to the big gate. I tore it free, stuck it in my girdle, and rushed here to you. See."

He laid before the popping eyes of Pablo the reward notice describing Micky.

"By my faith, Juan, you have done a night's work. Landlord, more of this bottle; and, boys, crowd my table. Here's a sight for sore eyes. Look and see what and who The Irish Kid is!"

His companion crowded about him. When the wine came, Pablo laid out a course of action; Victoria would remember that night a very long time—and Pablo Sanchez and his wit as well. While they drank, a sleepy old woman, resting her aching back against the adobe wall, under the window of the *taberna*, suddenly aroused and listened to the words of Pablo and his henchmen; she heard their plans while a great numbness grew in her heart.

"*Pobrecito! Mi* Carmencita," she muttered. "If I could but stand upon my—Hey, my little man, help an old woman."

She signaled a passing youth, who assisted her to arise, and she gave him her blessing as she hobbled down the shadowy road toward the back door of a teeming dance hall. From the interior came the sounds of music and the tinkle of laughter and the swish of dancing feet. Loudly she knocked on the door and after a moment a man opened it.

"Be gone, thou filthy old crow," he cried. "Carmencita wants none of thee."

"Tell her it is important. I do not want money, see!" and she opened her palm and exhibited a piece of American gold. "Tell her, for the love of the Virgin, I would speak to her about the Irish *Chico*."

The attendant slammed the door. Almost instantly Carmencita flung it wide.

"What brings thee out, now, Mother?" she asked, as she stepped outside.

The old beldame told her what she had heard, and how Pablo intended to harm the young gringo who had won the love of the town. "They said, my child, that he should squirm, and—hist!"

Then she whispered some strange words into the ear of her child. Carmencita paled at the disclosure and steadied herself with a hand against the wall.

"I heard it plainly, I tell thee. See, I have the gold yet! I have not bought my bottle, I am sober, *niña*. I heard it as clear as ever I heard thy cry as a babe." The aged hag actually wept.

"And the name was Micky Malone?"

"*Ai*, that and nothing more. I swear it. He killed a man in gringo land and the dogs are hunting him. Think, one thousand *pesos!*"

"Thank thee, Mother. Here's more gold for thee," and Carmencita gave a five-dollar coin into the aged woman's palm. "Silence!"

"I knew thy heart, my little one. I knew that thou would have me tell thee this gossip. Once I, too, was as fine a girl as thee. I tell thee, thou art a child to brag about. He, he, he!" And she hurried into the shadows and headed for a cheap tavern where her *pulque* was sold.

WHEN Carmencita returned to the dance-floor she sought one of the musicians and, bending casually over his chair, whispered into his ear.

"When you take your next drink, leave this room and go to the

livery," she directed. "Tell Dan Campbell to send my horse around and tie it to the rack. Tell him to put two nose-bags on the saddle horn and tie my saddle-bags to the saddle and fill them with food enough to last two people three days. And canteens—big!"

The dreary faced player looked up into her eyes. "There are men who would sell their souls to go riding with thee in the moonlight; this gringo is a luckier dog than they, by far," he said in a singsong tone.

"Don't you know, my Francisco, that the heart of a woman is like the paths of the wind?"

"Verily, I am young, but I have found that out—to my hurt."

Micky entered the front door and the room rang with applause.

"My dance, Carlos!" Carmencita shouted to the leader.

"'Tis four numbers down the program."

"My dance, you bacon-rind. How dare you talk to me of numbers?"

The music ended with a crash. Micky and his party of friends were escorted to a table near the dance space; and, as they took chairs, a violin began with a slow croon, and concertinas and guitars wailed out a plaintive air. Carmencita glided into the open area and the room hushed as though a vast force had stifled it.

She was conjuring, elusive as a dream, a flashing, gliding vision, her eyes snapping with deep fires, her smile reaching everywhere. The music wailed on. Carmencita shook out her dainty lace *mantilla*, embroidered with black and yellow birds and strange hand-painted flowers, and it flew about her like a mist of pictured smoke. Her short ballet skirt, stiff, and translucent with a hidden shimmer of gold, gave to her appearance that of a being floating in the air.

The wail ceased; the strain of music had now become an urge, a plea, almost a prayer; and to its beat the girl swayed, flashed and doubled; her toes, here, there, everywhere, in a succession of motions entrancing to the mind, bewildered the very senses.

Of a sudden her smile died. Pablo Sanchez had entered the room and with seven companions crowded his way to a table reserved for him at the side of the dance floor. His face was mottled and a green fire flamed from his heavy, half-closed lashes. A waiter brought four bottles to the table and filled all glasses there. Around and around went the girl, circling that small smooth space with increasing rapidity.

At an intricate figure, when bending backward till her head touched the floor, she smiled at Micky; twisted upon her hips and sprang into the air. The house burst into a riot of applause and old Carlos the leader, sprang to the dance-floor and swayed his violin to the ecstasy of her grace. The music died; the little form subsided; the castanets slacked their sharp detonations; the smile faded; the head drooped, and, as a maid curtseys, so Carmencita sat gracefully back upon a foot, her ballet-skirt spread out about her; her free limb straight and rigid, toe pointed; an exquisite posture of climax.

With both hands she blew kisses to the crowd; and literally raced to Micky's table. The musicians started to play, and, with a spring she pulled Micky to his feet and they whirled away in the maze of a waltz.

"I know you, my Micky," she whispered, her face hidden in his shoulder, "my Micky Malone from San Antone. I saw your name in the papers of El Paso when I was there two weeks ago. They say mad dogs are on your trail, and that Pablo——"

"What about him?"

"Tonight he will take you out of this place and sixty of his men will hold back the cowboys while you are carried over the border. But I have a plan. My horse is outside and I will have food for us. I will show you a way to beat these jealous dogs. Even I, who am a child of the desert and know its trails like a book that is once read. The reward is nothing to me."

"How do you know these things?"

Carmencita whispered the words her mother had revealed, and also told of the poster Pablo's man had found.

"One false look, my friend, and we are lost. You must love your Carmencita. It is the only way. I will make him jealous; very jealous. Surely you will help? Did I not agree to this when Shorty Glover came to me a week ago? But then, I had not felt your arms, nor seen your eyes ——"

"What are you saying?"

"I tell you, my big brave boy, they knew me, those rough diamonds up at the Triple X. They said they had a man who was as beautiful as a woman and as shy as a colt. I laughed at them. They said they wanted to make Pablo jealous. And so, they brought you to me. I am glad! Sanchez is flabby and coarse, a runt; and I don't care for his money. See! Not now, but the next time we go 'round. You can tell

from the look in his eye how he hates us both. Soon he will break and then, if he starts in here, we have a chance. Your friends will help."

"They tell me, Carmencita, that you are a widow."

"Don't trouble thyself, my Micky, we women of Mexico make many mistakes. Always when we are young."

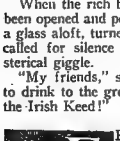
It seemed to him that, as she said this, she winced and the breath left her body; that she grew a bit limp in his arms.

"Wine!" she laughed and dropped out of his embrace. "I want wine—and in a tall, thin-stemmed glass, boy! Sparkling wine! Tell the front of the house that three bottles are to be sent to this table, on me. I make pigs pay for my princes!"

She spoke the words with a loud grim voice which reached far across the room as the musicians ceased to play. Pablo moved uneasily in his chair and twisted his body a degree closer to the side of the table. Her lips framed an epithet.

When the rich bubbling champagne had been opened and poured, Carmencita lifted a glass aloft, turned to face the room and called for silence as a girl stifled a hysterical giggle.

"My friends," she laughed, "I ask you to drink to the greatest rider of them all, the Irish Keed!"



FROM the corner of Sanchez's table a long stab of flame leaped and the glass in the girl's hand tinkled to flying atoms. Micky swung around in time to see Pablo leap free of the table and rush to the middle of the floor. His gun was slowly coming down in the air, and his malevolent, insidious, repulsive eyes found Micky. At that moment, Carmencita hurled the part of the glass yet remaining in her hand at Sanchez's face and started toward him.

This disconcerting action caused his poise to slip, his hand to falter. In that fraction of time his gun wavered. As it barked, Micky leaned in toward the table, the Mexican's slug shattering the back of his chair. Not until then did his hand slap his holster. The leather sheath half upturned, and was followed instantly by the roar of a forty-five. The Mexican steadied in his tracks; his legs became rigid; a surprised look waved into his face, and his twisting lips and puckering eyes told of the shock of the bullet. Along the crimson velvet of his waistcoat, a black, smeary splotch was rapidly spreading. The Mexicans who had followed Pablo in now hurried away; just as the limp body fell in a sprawling heap.

"This way, Micky!" shouted Carmencita. "Out this side door!"

The startled youth gazed on the figure stretched out before him and then turned his eyes on Shorty and Old Man Massey. They had jumped to their feet and now stood, guns drawn, beside the table, eyes sweeping every face and hand and gun.

"Sure, old man," said Micky, his voice sounding like that of a heart-broken child, "if I'd 'a' known why you was wanting me to come down here, I would have cut out my heart before I'd 'a' done it. 'Tis many and many a hard night's sleeping the likes of you will be having, I'm thinking. Remember, Mr. Massey, what I'm a-telling you. You've hurt the best part of a man; the trusting heart of a man, by teaching him to distrust his friends. You're owing me a bit of money. Take it, and buy some flowers for the grave of this poor devil. And may God forgive ye."

"Where you goin'?" asked Shorty, the foreman.

"Out further in the desert, where *all* buzzards fly in the air. To the land where a man can forget."

"This way, Micky," cried Carmencita, and he hurried after her.

In the small hall beside the outside door, she took down an old pair of riding trousers and jumped into them quickly. Then she opened the door and ran to a horse that stood at the same rack with Micky's; together they mounted and rode away.

Back of them sounded the clatter of horses approaching the scene at a frantic gait. Pablo's friends had come back.

Carmencita set the pace down dark alleys and shadowy streets, till she came to a dry arroyo; up this she turned and broke into a fast lope. Her loosened hair streamed behind her head like a black veil.

Micky, riding at her stirrup, was miserable. It seemed to him that all his happiness now lay back in his buried youth. The future was desolate and damned.

Just as the first streaks of dawn were showing in the east the two strange riders came out upon the crest of a great ridge, weather-scarred, brown, burned and brittle. Before them lay the desert, now smoky with the rising dew and a-twitter with the first chirps of awakened birds. The living sky burst a flaming red.

"There it is, Micky," said Carmencita,

a sad, tired note in her voice. "Good luck, my boy. I shall have the *padre* say a mass for you, and when I count my beads your name shall be upon my lips. A candle shall always burn for you in St. Xavier's."

"What's the name of that Pass?" he asked, ignoring her words.

"Estaño jarro cañada."

"Tin Can Sheep-walk, is that it? It must be thirty miles away."

"Yes. *Adios;* I am sorry, my friend. I did not know or I would not have agreed. But you should not worry; no, that is not right. You were but the hand of Fate. God was directing your finger."

"But why did you want him killed?"

"It was he, Micky, who knifed my Luis; my husband, who was as the light of the day to me. When they told you that I was a widow, they did not lie. Now I can go back to Monterey and forget what I have been. Revenge died in me tonight."

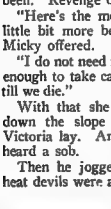
"Here's the money I won today and a little bit more besides, it will help you," Micky offered.

"I do not need it," she refused. "I have enough to take care of my mother and me till we die."

With that she turned and rode slowly down the slope toward the spot where Victoria lay. And Micky fancied that he heard a sob.

Then he jogged on where the dancing heat devils were at play.

III



ICKY was of the untamed, the raw; his was the cunning of the wild; and yet he had a yearning for the refinement that went with a palace built entirely of dreams. His resolutions belonged to the bleak and windswept highlands where there was nothing but granite; still he heard strange calls, saw queer signs, felt unseen contacts whenever he rode the desert.

Mañana! Tomorrow! This thought, or weakness, was not a part of him; but "over there" was. The other side of things, thoughts, movements, desires, people—these obsessed him. He stared at nature with these questions screaming from all his senses—What? Wherefore? Whence? And his courage was of the high, ultimate, natural order.

He felt in the face of the unknown as the first man must have felt when he saw the first stroke of lightning hit a tree and raised a hand and asked of the heavens—why?

With it all was an unknown aching for peace and quiet, and a woman's way to the trails of love; he knew very definitely that some day she would come and that he would know her as the *she* who had been cut out of the human-herd for him and him alone.

This, too, was an obsession. Now, as he rode across the heated floor of the desert, a great desolation filled him. He felt the fire of the day pounding upon both sides of his face; it shriveled and burned and bit into his leathery skin as the horror of his killings burned into his mind. With this depression came the desperate resolve to put all mankind back of him; to live, in a way hateful to every crying fiber of his being—alone. Yes, all alone. Maybe, Barney his pony, but that would be all. There would be birds, flowers, the winds, the growing things essential to life, and the stars at night and the sun by day. These should be all—save memories.

The entire day he rode folded over his saddle, except for a brief rest at noon. At sunset, when he saw the long shadows of the hills creeping out to meet him, he determined that after a day's rest, amid the scant trees of the approaching ridge, he would ride on and on to the land of utter forgetfulness, where a man might lose a name.

Up there he made out the pass. A saddle, among the peaks.

Estaño jarro cañada—Tin Can Sheep-walk. This place Carmencita had said was known to very few men and the wild goats and Big Horn sheep had found a way over the range; a way that a horse could follow. On the other side there would open before him a land of rivers and many small nooks, in some of which were ranches and men who would welcome him. Northward, a hundred miles, the railroad ran. This region would be exactly the place. Somewhere he would rest.

He jogged along urging Barney with a coaxing tone and the horse wiggled its ears at the sound of his voice. At last they stopped on the other side and camped in a little gully where the bell-like sound of trickling water came up from the shady depths of a cool glade. Close by was a patch of long rank grass.

Here, after watering his pony, he made camp and cooked a meal. Just before he rolled in his blanket he hobbled Barney and

saw that the animal was comfortable. Then came sleep, dreams—joy and horror.

It was broad day when he awoke. A trifle of stiffness in his joints assailed him; a bit of brain-fag coming with a rush, a tired eye-strain where the sun had hurled its destroying rays all the day before. But around him was life, and far west he saw patches of fresh green. The sight dispelled his gloom at once and the romping lust for exploration filled his mind; a smile played about his lips; his gentle stroking of his horse showed that he was once more his old buoyant self, Micky Malone from San Antone.

"The top of the mornin' to you, Barney, me boy," he said. "And by that same token, the latter part of the day to yourself. I'm thinking the two of us will be after seeing something down below there."

The pony muzzled his shoulder and cocked its ears. Then from somewhere below there came the sound of men. Micky slipped a small tie-rope over Barney's nose, to prevent a betraying whinneying, and, leading the animal behind a clump of underbrush, tied it to some heavy stems. Then he crept forward till he could make out a barren spot toward which the voices were traveling. Soon he saw a band of horses walk into view, heads down, bodies dust-streaked and sweat-covered. It took no second look to determine that they had been pushed over the hills fast. Then came the men, five of them. Four were Mexicans, superb and slim riders, mounted on grotesque looking horses. The fifth figure was that of a broad-shouldered American. All were heavily armed and the American was talking. He rode a big, rangy roan.

"Y'u light out an' tell Antonio to get us something to eat," he was saying; and one of the younger men at his side spurred his jaded beast into a light lope and passed the driven herd.

"Horse-thieves," murmured Micky. "It might be a good idea to tail them babies. It won't be a-hurting me a bit to make the acquaintance with that bunch. I've got to learn the country and a horse-thief's the best guide in the world."

Trail them he did, on foot, till he saw the band disappear from the trees and gain the floor of a tall mesa. Then he quickly retraced his steps, mounted and rode away. He caught the wide, distinct trail of the band of horses and followed it back upon itself, till, about noon, he came to a camp-site. A fire had been made here, and he saw, from the hoof-marked grass, that the horses had done a lot of milling. Intuitively he estimated that, if the horses had been stolen, brands had been hidden at this point. After a moment he proved his surmise.

Beneath the ashes of a large fire, much too large for the needs of five men, he found loose earth. Throwing this up with a limb, he exposed three branding irons: one with a half-moon brand, the others straight-edges. He smiled grimly, pulled the metal rods from the place of concealment and carried them farther down the trail, where he hid them in a rotten log and turned the log bottomside up. Then he decided to leave the trail and strike due west, where he had seen the greenest shade.

AGAIN, at night, he camped on the high slope of the range and in the morning moved toward the spot where the lower hills rolled into a misty distance, where he knew the second and worst desert stretched. He had seen many evidences of the habitation and movements of men—the country was becoming man-marked for sure, but he followed no route which contained the imprints of shod hoofs and determined that he'd keep "sifting," as far as he could, without showing his face. When his food gave out would be time enough; he wasn't clean away yet. He must go on, and on, till——

Dropping down from a scrub covered hogback into a narrow swale, he suddenly came upon a wagon-road. As he was about to cross this, he looked down the hill and saw a crude signpost. This intrigued him and toward it he rode. Back of it stood four or five boxes, placed there for the reception of mail.

On the largest of these he saw the reward-poster broadcast by the sheriff of Nolan County. Micky felt incensed at the staring features of himself, smiling insolently back into his eyes. Bending from his saddle, he tore the placard from the weathered boards of the mail-box and hurried away from the spot, down a fork, which led across the deep dry-swale.

A mile distant he could no longer see the dim ranch road and here he broke into the heavy timber where sounded the faint moos and bawls of cattle. After a while, amid the trees, he rode among many fine fat cows, on the flanks and sides of which were the marks of a large brand. This

aroused his curiosity and he read it instantly. It was the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S.

"Sure," he mused, "and it's no poor devil that's owning them cows; and it's no common cowman, either. Beef cattle, like them, in a place like this, I'm thinking, ain't come without baiting the Devil's own troubles."

Through the pines the sun was pouring upon a broad sagebrush land spotted everywhere with the sleek, gray shine of the afternoon's light. Across this flat Micky saw another ridge toward which he headed at once, stuffing the reward notice, without thinking, in a saddle-pocket.

Then, before him, in that area where all was a dazzling, shimmering azure, even to the sky, he discerned a streak of mobile crimson. It appeared as though a red wound, in that plain, was opening before his eyes; the carmine was brilliant and bobbing and he fathomed it instantly—a girl, it was, attired in a rich silken jacket or blouse, and she was tearing madly through the sage on a calico pony. She swerved and made west, before she saw him, and he watched her fade magically in the high fields of heat-waves arising above the mesquite patch on the flat. When he came to the last rise he swept the land before him, thinking to catch sight of her again, but she was nowhere to be seen.

Then he heard a pistol-shot.

Spurring Barney lightly, he loped in the direction of the detonation and saw, when he came out of the greasewood, a bunch of desert cows, tall, angular, starved-looking beasts clustered about a big blue steer which was pawing the earth and looking occasionally, with the rest of the herd, at a point directly before it.

"There's a man-killer," he mused, "a regular cow-bully."

Without estimating the danger of discovery, Micky ploughed ahead as fast as Barney could travel and simultaneously he saw the big blue leave the rest of the cows and break into a tearing rush. From the thin fringe of the sage leaped the small, athletic form of the girl. On foot she raced for a bunch of tall mesquite trees. As she ran, she endeavored to pull off the blazing red jacket she wore above a pair of beautifully tailored riding breeches.

Micky lay low over his pommel, unhooking his rope as he ran. He shook out a small loop and hung the slack so that he could snub the lariat to his horn and throw the maddened beast when his rope had settled around its neck. He made up his mind that he'd "bust" that steer and take all the fight out of him at one drop.

Speaking softly to his pony, he sprang immediately in the tracks of the animal ahead and, when he bore down on it, threw a perfect loop, which snuggled just where he wanted it to. Barney stopped, half turned; and the shock of a thousand pounds of bone and muscle rushing headlong came with sudden violence upon the slender *maguay*. It snapped, as though it had been twine; but not before the steer had felt its impact and turned almost a flying side-fall. However, it arose and started after the hurrying streak of red as though nothing had interfered.

Micky thought to pull his gun, but on second thought considered the risk too great; a scant thirty feet lay between the long vicious horns of the enraged steer and the girl. Should his bullet not drop the beast, its horns would do their deadly work before he could prevent; that outlaw was as fast as a horse.

It seemed at that moment, from the supreme outburst of speed which Barney developed, that the horse thought its master intended to bulldog the animal ahead; the gallant pony swerved immediately to the side of the racing horns and leaned far in toward them. Micky left his saddle at that instant and felt the great bone-like spines settle under his gripping fingers. If ever his powerful arms had exerted the uttermost power of their long pliable muscles they did so at that precise moment. In a veritable cloud of dust, horse, steer and bulldogger went headlong to the earth. Barney arose at once.

Twisting that vibrating neck upon its base, Micky lifted a leg and hooked it over the upper horn. Almost simultaneously a series of bellows arose which told of the mingled surprise and pain then filling the steer.

When the steer was quiescent, Micky turned his face and saw the girl just arising from the dust. He realized that his rescue had been nothing short of a miracle, for she stood, looking at him out of fear-stricken eyes, not ten feet away. He smiled. Barney had turned about and now gazed at the plight of his master with great understanding orbs; then slowly walked toward him.

"Ma'am," said Micky, "if you will get into my saddle, I'm dead sure I can handle this fellow. I'll be up and back of you before he can untwist this neck."

"Haven't you a tie-string?" the girl asked, with almost complete calm, her eyes

sweeping Micky's face strangely. "I can tie his legs if you have." Then she smiled.

"There's a pair of them wound under that off front-roll, if you really want them."

WHILE she moved to obtain the small ropes, Micky's eyes followed her and a great sense of beauty and ineffable calm came upon him. The upturned face and head of the steer were twitching and he could feel the pulse pounding in the steel hard tendons of the neck, while huge bubbles of blood were blowing outward from the distended nostrils. Then the girl took entire possession of his mind.

Where had he seen that face before? Was it among those faces which had been torn from magazines and plastered over his end of the room at the bunkhouse, back at Sweetwater?

"By God," he mused, "if I'd 'a' known the likes of her was a-riding this kind of land, I'd 'a' been combing this sage a long time ago."

Smiling, she came toward him and he saw her walk to the other side of the steer. In a moment he heard her voice and it was well poised, filled with assurance, and of a mellow, rich timbre.

"Turn him loose, he won't pound much now!" she advised.

Micky released his hold and stood upon his feet, knocking the dust from his shirt and picking up his hat.

"I'm grateful," said the girl extending a white, small hand. "If it hadn't been for you, he'd have caught me."

"He wasn't what you'd call right crazy about that jacket you was a-wearing," he said, grasping her fingers warmly, "but it wouldn't have worried you so if my rope had held. It's one of them old greaser soapweeds and I've had it a bit too long, I'm a-thinking."

"Oh," exclaimed the girl, staring directly into his eyes.

"And, oh, what?" asked Micky.

"I know you!"

"I was a-thinking the very same about you a moment ago. We'll be meeting the second time, it seems. Do you mind a-telling me where we met before."

"You are Micky Malone from San Antone."

Into Micky's mind there flashed a vision of a gray, rainy day and two long thin bands of slippery rails; he saw a centipede squirming through a crack on a railroad station platform.

"Ah, miss, and it's the truth you're a-talking, now. And you are Mazie—Mazie—" he hesitated, and a dancing light flared in his eyes. "Wait a minute, and I'll be after telling you the rest of it. It's Buchanan. There you have it. Buchanan."

"That's right."

Then came the tears. The girl leaned against Micky and shook as though with cold. When the first pangs of her hysteria had passed, she looked into his eyes.

"And how come you to be a-foot?" Micky asked, thinking to free her of the ordeal through which she had passed.

"My pony stumbled into a coyote hole and broke his leg. I shot him."

"It was your gun I was a-hearing then, just before Blue here started to run for you?"

"Yes. I must have attracted its attention when I killed my horse."

"What'll we be a-doing, now?"

"I live about five miles from here."

"Then up on Barney we go, and I'll show you a horse that can behave. Sure, he's never felt the heft of a woman's weight on him before, but I'm a-thinking he'll carry the two of us home in jig time."

Mazie caught a stirrup, twisted it to her foot and was back of the saddle in a flash.

"I want you to know that Barney and I are going to get along first-rate," she said. "You see, he isn't fussed nearly as much as you. Right now you're wondering how you can crawl into the saddle ahead of me without scratching me with your spurs."

With that she dismounted. Micky vaulted astride Barney. She grasped his hand and swung in behind him.

As they were about to move away, Micky leaned down, after turning his pony, and in a twinkling untied the ropes from the steer. Big Blue arose weakly to its feet and stood straddle-legged as it watched the strange sight of the double-loaded horse vanish among the dusty limbs of the mesquite.

A short time later, as he put away his pony in a cool barn and hung up his saddle on a peg, Micky walked back to the ranch-house. There Mazie stood with her mother and father, graphically describing the close call she had had. As he walked into the house, he forgot entirely about the crumpled piece of paper he had left in a saddle-bag pocket.

The world had become Paradise and

somehow he liked the layout of the small grove of cottonwoods and pepper trees where nestled the home of the Buchanans. He had seen, over the tall arch of the gate, the same brand he had detected on the fat, sleek cattle up among the tall timber. It was the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S.

And it seemed almost like he was coming —home.

Home!

His blood ran riot in his veins. Then Mazie caught his hand.

"Father says, Micky," she rambled, "that you are going to stay here tonight. And maybe, if you like us well enough, there's a job here waiting for you. A good top-hand job."

"How does the father of you, Miss Mazie, know that I'm as salty as he'd like to have a top-hand?" Micky asked.

Mr. Buchanan wrinkled his tanned old face and a grin spread over it.

"Mazie tells me that you bulldogged Big Blue, the worst wild steer this side of the border, and any man who can do that can do any cow-work I've got. There isn't a horse on this place that can get close enough to that critter to let a man slip a rope over those horns. Your horse must be chain lightning."

"Yes, sir, my Barney's got speed enough to slide anyways across a country that he pleases."

"Then you'll stay?" queried the girl.

"I need you badly," added the old man, "a few days ago I lost a bunch of my best horses and now the boys are out tailing the thieves, who crossed into Mexico. I must have someone with me here for a few days, at least."

"Then that's over with," smiled Micky. "And may the good Lord put the power of revelation in the boys what's chasing them dirty thieves. What kind of horses were they, sir?"

"I wouldn't mind the range stock, but I have a finely gaited big roan which I got from Hunter, at Walden, and I wouldn't take five hundred for him, cold."

"Has he a bit of a jagged white star in his face?"

"Yes, why?"

"He's maybe sixteen one or sixteen and a half hands high?"

"Exactly!"

"Do you know a tallish hunk of a big fellow, which is all I know of him, except a head of black hair and a streak of gray on the side of it, above the tip of his right ear?"

"Pinky McKim," muttered Buchanan. "Are you sure?"

"I saw him as I came down off those high hills due east of here, as a magpie would fly. Right now he's got twenty-four head of pretty fair range stock on the top of that dishpan mesa under the pass."

"What pass?"

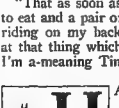
"Estaño jarro cañada."

"I never heard of it. There's but one pass over that range anywhere near where you say and that's twenty miles south of east from this ranch. It is at Harney Spring. Some of my boys have gone there."

Mazie saw a glitter in Micky's eyes.

"What are you thinking?" she asked, curiously.

"That as soon as I can be getting a bite to eat and a pair of fresh horses, I'll be a-riding on my back-trail and a-looking up at that thing which your daddy says ain't. I'm a-meaning Tin Can Sheep-walk."



"HALLO!"

A voice sounded from the road and Mother Buchanan stepped to the window. "It's Pinky, Father, and he's coming in the yard," she whispered back to her husband.

Buchanan opened the door and at the sight of him the horseman stopped a short fifteen paces away.

"I'm hearin', Buchanan," he began, "that while I've been up to town you've lost some horses. Can I help you any?"

As Micky stepped through the door McKim fixed him with a fish-like stare which startled the young Irishman. One of the rider's eyes was of a light shade of rose, which gave to his countenance a revolting aspect, he was the identical man Micky had seen riding the tall, rangy roan, beside the Mexicans.

"Tell him nothing," whispered Micky, bending suddenly as though a spur had loosened.

Mazie's father looked long and steadily into his visitor's face. "I reckon *you* can't be of much help to us, Pinky," he said slowly and with emphasis. "I'm thinking of doing this hunting alone."

McKim passed a few remarks and, as he started to ride away, Micky strode to his stirrup.

"I'll be a-shutting the gate on you, Mr. McKim," he said.

"I thought I knew 'em all, from El Paso

west to Jim Slaughter's, but you're a new one on me," Pinky sneered querulously when he was on the road.

"Sure," said Micky, "I ain't much on any one sort of country. I'm the human peach-bough."

"What?" asked McKim, stupefied.

"I can ride over a country and locate metal by the sense of feel, like a peach-bough locates water."

"Metal? Are you prospecting?"

"There you have it; all of it. And now I'll be a-telling you good day."

"Whata you mean, feller?"

"I talk with a bit of a brogue, 'tis sure, but they do say that for the best of the King's English there's no mistaking an Irishman. I'm a locater of metal. Sometimes I've tried my hand at finding it in the shell of a man."

Pinky paled a trifle; he settled his bad eye grotesquely on Micky and rode away as his throat suddenly began to pulsate with a rush of fear. At the brow of a hill he broke into a fast lope and was swallowed up in a cloud of dust.

"Now," said Micky, reaching the little group at the door, "if you good people don't mind, I'll be Larry Moore to the folk of this country; we'll let Micky Malone from San Antone stay on the east side of that range."

"What did you say to McKim?" asked Mr. Buchanan.

"I told him I was a locater of metals, and I fancy he understood me thoroughly. That's why, I'm a-thinking, I'll ride away with a snack of lunch in me hand."

"Whatever do you mean?" Mazie asked.

"When I saw the horses Pinky was a-driving, I back-tracked him and found some irons buried under a dead fire. The damp of the water they had sprinkled on it was there yet. I took those irons and hid them. When we get the horses, I'm guessing we'll find your brand is a bit funny looking. Have you two fast horses?"

"I'll pick them out for you," said Buchanan, "but I don't want you to ride alone."

"And why not? It's only the roan I'm after, sir. I can lead two horses back as well as one. I'm after knowing this country, now, and how to keep out of the ways of men. There's not a bit of risk."

While the old man and Micky were roping two horses in the corral, Mazie went into the barn and saddled a coal-black filly and led it out to the grain shed, where she filled two nosebags and hung one to her saddle horn. Then she went to the house and her mother handed her a saddle gun, which she slipped into the boot. Then she stuffed the saddle-bags with food for two for three days.

"Where you going, dear?" asked her father.

"With Larry, Daddy," she replied, "if it isn't hazardous for him, it isn't for me."

"Please, sir," began Micky, "sure the young lady can't be a-riding with me; she ——"

"Micky—Larry, I mean—when you know her better you'll change your mind. She has convinced her mother and I have nothing to say," the rancher replied. Evidently he knew this daughter of his and was fully convinced of her ability to take care of herself.

"Good luck," shouted Mrs. Buchanan, and Mazie darted forward.

Micky leaped to the saddle, wound the lead rope of the halter to the horse following and started after the girl.

A wind sighed through the pepper trees and it seemed to the boy it sounded like the music he felt racing through his veins.

IV

MICKY had been correct in his estimate of the distance to the pass, but the mesa's west side lay some four miles nearer than he had thought. So, when the morning star arose, he and Mazie dismounted, left the horses in a thicket of greasewood, while he set out alone to reconnoiter the bench.

Darting from clump to clump of the scrub growth, in the wan, shadowy light of the stars, he advanced safely to a circular corral, around which he went cautiously till he reached and passed through a stand of four bars, to an open shed. Beyond this he distinguished the wraith-like outlines of a sod-house. Close beside it a barn, from which came the startled snorts of a horse that had detected his presence.

Studying his ground carefully, as he walked from the shed, he came to the stable, which had been fashioned from pifion-pine and adobe. Here he pulled aside a canvas door and looked inside. The bulk of an immense horse stood out clearly.

Darting to the gloomy interior of the stable, he was about to strike a match, to determine the identity of the animal, when the first streaks of the dawn sprang out of the east, slanted back to the earth, and

poured into the rough structure. Then the glare faded and the gloom once more prevailed. That flash of light was the dawn-before-the-dawn, the false sunrise, which can be seen occasionally along the high plateaus of Arizona and New Mexico. In that fleeting, inexplicable trick of the light, he had discerned the roan color of the horse and saw a white star blazing on its forehead as it turned to gaze at him. He untied its hackamore and led it silently from the stable. As it felt the stir of the morning air, it raised its head and vented its delight in a long piercing whinny.

Micky did not wait. He leaped to its back, neck-reined it through the two sets of bars and dashed across the bench at a breakneck speed. As he rode into the first of the mesquite and greasewood, he turned about and gazed behind him.

In the vicinity of what he estimated to be the outer edge of the corral he saw a long tongue of flame shoot into the gray curtain of the air and then a bullet whined viciously above him. He dug a spur into the flank of the roan and disappeared back of the sheltering mesquite.

THE moment Micky departed, Mazie set to work getting their mounts ready for quick action. She removed a part of the lunch and stuffed it in her companion's saddle-bags.

"Something might occur," she mused, "that would separate us and I sure want that boy to have food. I sure do."

There was a decisive quality about that affirmation. The words actually stumbled upon her lips. Then she changed the saddles to the freshest horses; she had picked up a lead-pinto for herself at a ranch some twenty miles from the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S. Soon she had the animals fully ready to ride in the event that Micky needed them. The moments dragged; an owl, some small distance away, flew about her and hooted mournfully; the desert air stole over the tops of her covert with a sort of purling susurration, which had in it all the suggestion of broken sighs.

Shooting-stars fell like rockets, from zenith to horizon, and planets dropped magically from sight. Then came a sudden rush of light and she strained her eyes in the direction in which Micky had told her to look for him. The scene was dimly illumined; then, as a window-shade is lowered, closing in a lamp's light from the outer darkness, so fell a curtain over the east and the gloom into which she peered became darker than before. Then, faintly, she heard the discharge of a high-power gun. It hung in the air like a cry of pain or a curse and without hesitation she led out the horses and stood between two of them, their reins and the lines of the lead animals in her hands.

After what seemed an interminable period, she heard the *clippety-clop* of a running horse. As she strained her eyes into the haze of gray shadows, the sun literally flung itself over the rim of the east and a rich, reddish glow pervaded everything. Then she saw Micky, coming like the wind, astride the stolen horse.

Mazie sprang to her saddle and was about to run toward her companion when her eye caught the flap of his saddle-bag. It stood open in the air, the lunch holding it up, and a piece of white paper seemed about to fall from it. She was in the act of tucking this back, when her eye caught Micky's face. Pulling it free, she held it on her saddle-roll and was reading it in utter consternation when Micky dashed up, leaped to the ground and into his saddle, twisted the roan's halter line about his horn and then reached for the rein of the animal Mazie was holding. At that moment he perceived her abstraction.

She lifted her eyes and extended the reward poster toward him.

"Don't think," she said, "I was snooping in your saddle-bags, Micky. It came out when I stuffed in your lunch. I didn't know. Really, I didn't."

"Sure, and it doesn't matter, miss; sooner or later, I'd have to be a-telling you. I was a-riding away from that dirty black ghost of a thing when I met you, and I stopped at the telegraph office and sent a wire to a man of the rangers in San Antone asking him for a fair trial. I told him to reply to me in the personal column of the *Express* of San Antone. Now, please be forgetting of it, will you? It will be thinking of other things, for a little while, the two of us will be a-doing, it seems to me. I woke up a hombre and he took a shot at me."

"I heard it," she said, turning her horse about and handing Micky a lead-line. "I'm ready when you are."

"Come on, then," he shouted.

The roan reared and pawed the extra horse Micky was handling. To steady both animals, he jerked a tight-line on their ropes. Unnoticed, the reward-notice fluttered from his finger and fell beside a

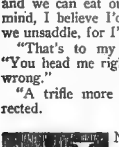
bush, just as they urged their horses to a fast clip away from the spot. Soon their pace ate up the miles between the mesa and the ridge to the west, where there was a dense yellow-pine forest carpeted with a rank growth of vegetation. Here they knew they could lose themselves and throw off pursuit, or at least hide their trail; for, on the thick grass, their ponies' feet would leave no telltale marks of hoofs.

When, at last, they found the deep shade of the trees, Mazie spoke and her voice sounded as though she had aged thirty years in the gruesome hours of the long night.

"From that high, bare point, above us, we can look back, over this flat and see everything for miles," she said. "There'll be water in plenty there, for the horses, and we can eat our lunch. If you don't mind, I believe I'd like a little rest when we unsaddle, for I'm really very tired."

"That's to my liking," he answered. "You head me right, if you see me going wrong."

"A trifle more to your left," she directed.



IN THE early afternoon Mazie awoke; she had gone to sleep as soon as she had eaten. Turning from the shade to the exposed shelf of obsidian on which Micky sat staring over the country, she called softly to him.

"It is your turn, now," she smiled. "Come on down and get a snack of rest. I'll stand guard and if I see anything out there that looks like riders, I'll awaken you at once."

Micky walked from the rock and flung himself on the cool moss and thick needles below a tall pine. When he awoke the stars were twinkling in the sky and a thin moon sailed like a melon-rind across the southern heavens.

"We'll be riding, now, miss," he said, a note of anguish in his voice, "and if you don't mind I'll be leaving you at the ranch where you borrowed the horse. Sure, it's from there you can be finding your way back home in safety. You keep my Barney."

"Micky?"

"Yes, miss."

"I don't believe what I read."

"It's the truth, ma'am," he answered. "They do be a-wanting me back there in Texas. That's why I have to keep on a-sifting. I'll never let the likes of John Sutter be a-taking me."

"Won't you tell me?"

"What?"

"The facts."

"And who's to make you believe them if I do?"

"You!"

Then out of the hidden chambers of his being and the deep intuitive wells of his soul, he interpreted her meaning and knew that what she had said she meant. As they rode, he told her of all that had befallen him at Sweetwater and at Victoria, down to the experience with Carmencita. It seemed he was impelled to do this, for in her face he saw a light that was like a strong and tangible sympathy; more than this, it was understanding—faith.

"I knew it," she exclaimed, when he had finished. "Now, Micky, we are going to fight this out. We are going to come into the open and do what we can. But I am not going to risk anything until I know the return shall be safe. Won't you trust me to do this myself? All alone?"

"Trust you?" he queried, and turned his eyes down the slope where the tops of the pine trees looked like billows in the shimmering light of the brilliant stars. "If you told me to ride into the check-room of hell, Mazie, I'd be glad of the chance. What do I care, if you don't think me a—" he hesitated—"a killer out of a bad-heart."

"I don't; I don't!" she cried in denial. So faintly that he caught only the merest whisper of the words, she added, "I think you are a boy, a great big, open hearted boy."

A catch came into his throat and a sob was strangled there and changed into a short, almost spasmodic cry of joy. For the next two hours each rode in a deep silence, broken only by some monosyllabic utterance which had to do with the progress of their flight. Toward midnight a tiny earth-light appeared below them and this the girl identified as the ranch-house where both would find shelter.

As Micky's horses, which were the fastest walkers, sensed the comfort of the stables ahead, Micky rode some distance in advance of the girl. After a while, unconsciously and from a heart frantic with a new-felt joy, his lips softly hummed his favorite song. Mazie, looking at his splendid silhouette, caught a snatch of the words and a lump came in her throat. She heard:

"Oh, sure, ye taught me lovin'
As ye wiped my tears away;
And now ye can't be blamin' me,
For I'm in love today."

Micky roused the house and in a few moments Mazie was weeping on the breast of a neighbor ranch-woman and telling the stolid soul of the suspense through which she had passed. When the house had settled once more and a hand had been posted, fully armed, down in the meadow, the wife of the rancher turned to her spouse as she blew out the lamp.

"Did y'u catch the look of our little Mazie's eyes when she come in the door?" she asked.

"Un-huh, Mother, it seemed to me that she had grown old all of a sudden. What did you think?"

"I don't know, but when she cried on my neck and looked up in my face after she quieted, it seemed to me that I saw a look in her eye like that of——"

"Well?" he asked.

"Of a woman; maybe a wife or a mother. I think she's something on her mind."

"Do you mind the night she was born?"

"Yes—why, it seems like yesterday," reflectively.

"Mother, we're gettin' a bit old; it was twenty years ago last March."

V

WEEKS drifted by peacefully for Micky, as September passed into October and a tang which made sleep delightful came into the air of nights. He was now riding range, far to the south, where Mr. Buchanan had moved a part of his herd and here he passed days without seeing a human being, living alone in a small cabin located high up among the odorous pines.

Pinky McKim had never been seen in the country after his conversation with Micky, and, though a posse hit the trail the day following the return of the roan, no sign had been found either of the lost band of young unbroken horses or the men who had stolen them. The countryside began to feel itself secure against further depredations.

Then early one morning, before daylight, Mr. Buchanan heard a sound of stealthy feet outside his window and the next instant felt something fall across the bed.

The clatter of departing hoofs told of a man riding away in the gloom. The aged rancher jumped from his bed, lit the lamp and examined the package. It was a small piece of stone wrapped about with a sheet of writing paper and it bore this message in Spanish:

> Friends of Pablo Sanchez under the command of Pinky McKim will leave the other side in a few days, if they are not now on their way, to capture or kill Señor Malone. By all means inform him of this danger. Tell him this comes from the person who told him of *Estaño jarro cañada.*

After breakfast Mazie rode away on a pony, carrying the note of warning; she would permit no one but herself to make the trip.

As she wound out of the rich valley to the plateau country of the south, where ever and anon she could see the outlines of the Mexican hills, a band of horsemen were riding parallel to her. One of this outfit, a halfbreed Yaqui, was riding ahead and it was he who first caught sight of the girl and her beautifully spotted pony. His mount was a sage-tail buckskin whose color blended perfectly with the country over which it traveled—head-down, dogged, unreal.

Shortly after noon the girl drew up to the range-rider's cabin and found Micky absent. He had ridden over the line that morning after some strays and did not expect to return until the sun had gone down. Mazie waited.

Somehow, as the moments dragged, it seemed to her that the very atmosphere held within itself a quality of portent; she experienced a deadening sensation, a restlessness that was foreign to her vivacious nature. Intuitively—she never knew why—she left the cabin, walked to the fence of a small horse corral, hung an old bridle and a gunny-sack across it and placed a hayfork against the bars. Why? The question rang through her like an echo. She was about to jerk the things away, when, as she looked down the slope, between the trees, she saw a flock of wild-turkeys fly across from the timber to an open ridge and disappear amid the sage. In that passage there was the hurry of alarm.

"Something has frightened those birds," she meditated. "I wonder what it can be."

She had removed the saddle from her pony, but, at the sight of the disturbed fowl she resaddled and, mounting, started

to ride toward the place where the turkeys had left the forest.

Suddenly she saw a lank scarecrow of a horse dart from a screen of bushes and head directly toward her. She made out the black, sun-scorched face of the Indian riding it and knew from his head-band that he was a Yaqui—a Yaqui on the trail, for he was almost nude, and Yaquis ever travel light and without showing a vestige of color which does not match with the landscape over which they ride.

She whirled her horse about and turned into a long flat upland which extended south toward the border; over this she galloped until, before she had traveled a quarter of a mile, she could no longer hear the crashing passage of her pursuer. Then she settled her pony to a walk and advanced with caution.

She remembered suddenly that she had removed her gloves, upon entering the cabin, and that in the palm of one of these she had secreted the note she had come to deliver. What if that Indian should discover this? Of a sudden, and directly before her, she saw four mounted figures file out of the trees and spread over the ground across which she intended to journey. She wheeled her horse and saw three more riders half-mooned about her backtrail.

Then it was that she realized she had been surrounded. She brought her paint horse to a stop and did some quick thinking. She saw that every avenue of escape was now closed to her and that if she did not make some desperate attempt the very mission on which she had ridden would fail. Micky would be waylaid and killed. Looking back at the quiet men sitting grotesquely in their saddles, she actually smiled, and prepared to dismount.

While in the act of climbing from her saddle she covertly dropped one of her small handkerchiefs from a pocket in her riding-trousers and it fell upon the earth and was covered with the toe of her boot. Then she moved about in the dust, designedly causing the clear imprints of her feet to appear in the ground. She knew Micky, if he were not killed or captured, would read her sign and know that at this point she had dismounted for some purpose.

She recalled a subterfuge a woman emigrant in the early sixties had employed against the Apaches. She moved her pony slightly, and around the mark of its front left foot she laid a perfect circle of her own boot-marks. This, she hoped, would be interpreted by a trained tracker and trailer, such as she knew Micky to be, as a message conveying to him that he should follow the hoof-print enclosed with the circle of her own feet.

At that instant she saw a face, a hideously smiling, twisted, diabolical countenance from which glared an evil and flaming pink eye. It was that of Pinky McKim. With an expression of utter fright she stared at the visage, now smirking with a fiendish grin, and leaped to her saddle and tore off in the underbrush between the two lines of horses.

There was a rush, a rapid converging of the two parts of the band and after a dash of perhaps five hundred yards a Mexican tore to her side, leaned forward and, grasping the bridle, jerked her pony to a halt. She made no resistance, and a great joy welled up in her as she saw that all the riders had followed. Her trick, laid in the dust, had not been discovered. McKim came toward her.

"Been out to have a li'l visit with the pretty boy?" he sneered. "I'm thinkin' yore daddy an' ma don't know jest all about that feller. Maybe you don't, neither?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you ever see this?" Reaching into a saddle-pocket he flirted the reward-notice in her face and gave it into her hand. "That thing he must be right proud of, for he was a-carryin' it when he got yore daddy's roan."

He guffawed, but as she read the paper she saw a whimsical light reassuring her from the pictured eyes of Micky. Pinky signaled one of the men, who sprang from the saddle and fixed a lead-rope about her pony's neck.

"May I keep this?" she asked.

"What y'u wantin' it for?"

"I think my father ought to know. This man is a desperate character and," at this point she smiled strangely and with entire composure, "there's a thousand dollar reward."

"Nope, I'm not a kid, honey. I'm dead wise to you an' not takin' nary a chance. Y'u're goin' with me."

A gripping sensation clutched at her breast; a sudden lassitude assailed her limbs, and, when she tried to make some protest, her throat was so dry she could utter no sound.

"I'm a takin' y'u over the border, Mazie, an if yore dad cares a damn about you he'll come across with some coin to get y'u back," Pinky went on. "If he don't, then

I reckon y'u an' me'll get along right well. An' I ain't a-carin' a continental whicha way it goes."

"Where?" the single-word query came from her lips like a dying sigh.

Then the pioneer-strain of her breed re-asserted itself and her will overcame the natural emotion which had deadened her senses. All the artfulness of her sex, the cunning of the woman of the far flung frontiers, arose in her and intrigued subtly as a defense.

"Y'u'll know just about midnight. I ain't a-goin' to hu't y'u. Y'u c'n tie to that. Why, doggone, honey," and his repulsive face grimaced into lines of odious horror as it filled with a light which he intended to be tender, "don't y'u know that I've been right crazy about y'u for years?"

"Dan't begin that," she interrupted. "I'm way past seven and I know your kind. You are positively stupid and clumsy."

"You win. What's yore dicker?"

"Let's get away from here quick. My father's boys will be along here this afternoon, and the cavy and remuda with the cook-wagon and foreman will be coming in tonight. Micky's up in the hills and with him are four more boys. They'll be branding these yearlings tomorrow. I don't want a fight, and I don't believe you do. If you'll get away from here quick, I'll agree to go along without making a fuss and you can make your terms to me when we get into Mexico."

"Y'u're still thinkin' of that Micky Malone, eh?"

"Perhaps; you never can tell about a woman—that's why I say you're clumsy."

The Mexicans actually guffawed. Only the Yaquis remained quiescent as the mirth rolled around the little band.

"Take off that rope," ordered Pinky, "and let's get goin'. Maybe I'll show y'u I ain't such a porcupine as y'u think I am."

"Quien sabe?" Mazie answered, as one of the men removed the lariat from her pony's neck.

Pinky placed himself at her side and at a shrill whistle the Indian who had followed her came out of the trees and joined the other men. McKim interrogated him in Spanish.

"Did you look into the cabin?"

"Si."

"What did you find?"

"Nothing. He was there last night but this morning rode south. There," and he pointed toward Mexico, "he has gone. Riding one horse and leading another, and he took all his ropes. I found nothing in the stable. Even his hackamore is missing."

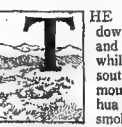
"Huh," muttered Pinky.

"Did I lie to you?" asked the girl.

"You said he was up north."

"Maybe, I'm not saying for sure, but maybe he has as many friends to the south as you. Who can tell? If he is a crook, I believe my daddy will find a lot of his cows have crossed over into Chihuahua and are now headed for Guzman,"

"By—" he supressed the epithet quickly, "I'm a-thinkin' y'u're about right. Let's be gettin' over the sage, y'u hombres! This piece of Texas raw-meat may have a hundred head of them white-faces just exactly where we c'n use 'em right now."



THE cavalcade started down from the timber and headed, after a while, directly into the southeast, where the mountains of Chihuahua lay dream-like in a smoky and distant haze. As she rode Mazie silently offered a prayer of gratitude that she had lured the marauders away from the ranger's cabin. Now she would concentrate upon how and when she would leave a trail by which Micky could follow them. In her heart there was no thought of that which might befall her. Her very being was alive to the pounding insistence of combat. She wanted to lead these men into some fatal blunder; to make them commit the very act which should bring about a failure of their plans. On she rode, silent, plotting, eager.

Late that night they wound down from the west slope of the first range of hills across the border and tied their saddle horses at a hitch-rack in front of a Mexican tavern.

McKim following Mazie, entered the stuffy adobe and, selecting a table in the corner of the room, ordered a jug of wine and some food. Across the bar, for it was simply that, Mazie saw a weirdly beautiful face peering into her own; it seemed, as she looked into the snapping, black depths of a pair of long-lashed eyes, that they were signaling her. Frankly, almost rudely, she returned that look.

"What a beautiful woman. Do you know her?" she asked McKim.

Pinky swung around in his chair and laughed as he saw the face at the far side of the room.

"I'll say I do. Come yere, Carmencita,"

he yelled, and the girl arose and stepped across the rough earthern floor.

An old woman, who had been seated at the side of the table near the girl, twisted about on her stool and looked at Mazie out of bleared and glazing eyes.

"*Buenas noches,*" greeted the girl. "You have come far, I see."

"*Que tal,* Carmencita?" asked Pinky.

"I am always happy," replied the girl. "This lady, señor; are you not forgetting something?"

"Sit down; this is Mazie Buchanan. Her an' me's done a li'l business today, an' maybe she's goin' to be my woman."

"I'm glad to know you," said Mazie, rising and taking Carmencita's hand impulsively.

"Pooh, if I were your lady this night, you should buy me sparkling wine," Carmencita turned almost poutingly to McKim. "Good champagne, not strong drink that the goat herds use every day." Disdainfully she indicated the cheap wine which had just arrived.

Pinky arose with a rush and strode to the inn-keeper who stood talking to some of the men who had come across the border.

"Have y'u a bottle of good wine?" he asked.

"The like of which these hills never have tasted," replied the landlord.

"Then bring two bottles and hustle up that meal."

While he was giving these instructions Carmencita nonchalantly leaned on the table and smiled unconcernedly into Mazie's face.

"They hurt Micky Malone, yes?" she asked.

"No."

"It was I who sent the note."

"You?"

"Look at my table and see that old woman and when you see her again do what she tells you. They do not trust me, but they will use her, for they know what drunkards will do for drink in Mexico."

"What makes you try this, for me?"

"It is because Micky did something, once—and because I hate these men—all men, who are not like him."

"You love him?"

"Señorita, I have lived a long while in a few years. I see with my eyes and hear with my ears and men have taught me much. I say to you that no woman loves two times. My love is dead, but, for Micky Malone, God——"

"Go on."

"I'd dance for the devil, without pay, if I could have a man like him—and no memories of my Luis."

"Will you help me?"

"*Sssh!*"

Pinky sat down at the table.

VI

MICKY had followed the wide grazing-path of a bunch of young cows the day before, and found that this led into the wild country across the border. Consequently he decided that he would cross the International Boundary and drive back the strays and pen up their leader or leaders; for, in long cow-pilgrimages, it is invariably the scheming of a single animal that leads the rest away.

Shortly after daylight he saddled Barney and, leading another horse, set out to the south, his horse-feed and lunch rolled up and tied back of his saddle in his slicker. This was the season when short but heavy rains, in the mountains, might be expected any hour; stray clouds had already begun to appear coming out of the west.

At noon his route ran him into some high levels, where, he knew, a series of *tinajas,* or tanks, natural basins which were filled during wet weather, would be visited by the yearlings. He decided, when he saw no stock, to feed and water his horses here and eat a bite of lunch himself.

Just as he was about to resume his journey, he looked back on his trail and thought he saw a column of dust sifting toward the ridge on which his cabin was located. Untying a pair of strong glasses, given him for range-use, he focused them on the spiraling spot in the distance and quickly estimated it to be a band of moving horses. He saw that it was sailing along at a good pace, from the southeast to the northwest. What could it mean? Was a bunch coming from the ranch to see him? Or was it——?

He'd slant an eye on that thing, and keep it there, too.

Then, if the dust came along *his* trail he'd know exactly what to do. Keep on, a-shovin' on into Mexico, where there were no sheriffs and the people could not read notices tacked in out-of-the-way spots. He placed his horses in a small grass plot and sat himself on a high ledge where he could look over all the land to his rear. After a wait of more than an hour he saw the

dust, once more, almost where he had first discerned it; and it was traveling fast on its own back-trail. He knew what that meant.

"Huh?" he mused, "that's kind of funny. I'm a-thinking them cows'll have to wait for me."

He saddled the horse he had been leading and led Barney.

In three hours, by following down arroyos and sliding along, back of high mesas, he reached a spot where he could easily see his cabin and corral with his naked eye. There he employed his glasses and swept the little collection of fenced land for some sign that would tell him why that bunch of horsemen had come upon his ridge.

The first sight that met his vision, as he caught the pole-corral in his lens, was the bridle, gunny-sack, and pitchfork on the fence. This meant something; for he knew he had not left them there.

"Why?" he asked himself, "would anybody be a-wanting to put a fork against that gate; and why the old bridle and gunny-sack?"

In the early days of our border, like the primitive times of all our West, a man wore his hair because he "half-hitched his scalp to his brains." Micky had been schooled in caution by the past-masters of the Texas bad-lands and every feature of a situation meant something explicit to him. The evidence of those mute articles upon his fence aroused his curiosity and his cunning at once. Steadily he peered at the cabin and the surrounding area for more than thirty minutes and then back through a cleft in the trees where he had last seen the rolling cloud of dust. It had vanished.

"Greasers, all right," he affirmed.

As though he had been assured of his security in approaching his cabin, he mounted and rode swiftly toward it. Tying his animals outside the corral, he walked slowly inside and stared at the ground around the bridle and sacking.

The print of Mazie's slim boot, in the sticky earth near the water-barrel, immediately caught his attention, and he followed her footsteps everywhere. Coming at last to the spot where she resaddled her pony, the torn earth told him of the sudden dashing away of the little pinto. He noted the direction of its flight and after a moment made out the hoof-prints of another horse following the first. These were odd. Broad and irregular. An unshod horse had made them. Instantly a fear flashed into his mind; it gripped him so swiftly, and numbed him so completely, that he stood stock-still and looked about him.

Then back to his cabin he went and in the darkened interior had difficulty in using his eyes. He closed them for an instant, then opened them and saw a pair of gloves on the table. He knew these long, slender, tan pieces of fawn-skin and, picking them up, was smoothing them tenderly, to the racing speed of his thoughts, when the movement of one of his fingers was followed by a tiny crinkling of sound. He shook the glove and out fell a piece of paper. Hurriedly he read it and put it inside his pocket.

"That's plumb it," he spoke aloud, "just as I was a-thinking. They've got her. And all because she come out here to tell me of the danger I was in. Well——"

He fell at once to filling a flour-sack with grub and after a moment was leading both horses to the water trough and then riding away on the double trail which led to the tall timber.

From some little distance he saw the white outlines of Mazie's handkerchief. Riding to this, he leaned from his saddle and picked it from the ground. When he straightened up he saw where she had stamped her feet around the imprint of her pony's hoof and smiled sadly at the grim evidence of her fortitude.

"And, sure, darling, you'll not long be wondering where I am, after this night," he murmured.

Mickey dashed back to his cabin, found a pencil and paper and hurriedly scrawled a note and pinned it to his table. He had addressed it to the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S, and it read:

While I was away this day, Miss Mazie was caught by Mexicans, and I'm now on the trail of them. They went over the border thirty miles southeast of here and I'm heading for that break in the hills you fellows calls the Swayback.

Then he propped open the door and hurried away.

ON A chimney rock on a nearby mesa, which could be distinctly seen from ranch headquarters, he piled a high mass of dead greasewood limbs. Over this he laid a bunch of thick and green mesquite. The owner of the

ranch had instructed him that, if he wanted assistance at any time, he should start a smoke-signal from that chimney and the help would be sent. It had been stipulated that someone would examine the point of rock each night at six.

Micky remained by the pile of boughs till his watch lacked but five minutes of the agreed time, then struck a match to the mass and rode away. When he turned to look at the mesa he saw a long tongue of blue black smoke ascending straight to the sky.

"Come on, Barney, me boy," he coaxed; "you can rest all next week if you'll take me to them hills tonight."

He tore along on the trail of Pinky McKim and his band at a rate of speed which simply ate up the distance. That night, when the moon came out, he was riding the high, bleak reaches of a spur, below which he distinguished, like fireflies, a cluster of adobe lights.

At that instant he heard a rushing horse. He turned into the security of a dense growth of shrubbery and tied his horses. The sound of an animal coming up the trail came closer and clearer.

Micky unwound his rope and the next instant, as he peered from his place of concealment, he saw a bronco flash by, a slim shape huddled low over its neck. He flung his rope with a sharp side twist and saw its loop settle about the rider. With the rope's end snubbed about the roots of the heavy bush alongside of which he stood, he smiled as the lariat snapped and the rider was jerked to the ground. Pulling his gun Micky approached the still form in the trail and turned it over with his foot.

A mingled thrill of joy and consternation raced through his mind as he gazed on the upturned face of Carmencita. Her eyes were closed, and he comprehended that the fall from the saddle had rendered her unconscious. Picking her up in his arms he walked to Barney, took his canteen and wet her face. As she opened her eyes and saw who was holding her, she smiled and settled back against his knee.

"The good Saviour has answered my prayers," she said faintly. "I prayed that He take me to you and, in the name of my Luis, he has brought me to your arms."

"How did you know where I was?" he asked.

"Señorita Buchanan told me what she had tried to do on the way here. And I knew you so well. Did you not, not so very long ago, show me that you were a king among men?"

"Is she safe? The señorita?"

"*Ai.* They have, in their drunken folly, set my old mother as a guard outside her room by day, and another old crone by night. A messenger has gone to the American side with a demand for twenty thousand pesos. It will be three days, till we can hear from him; then if he does not return, Pinky has told her father, he will see his child no more."

"In three days? Hm," Micky mused. "If I could be getting a word to her——"

"Am I not here? And do you think I have forgotten?"

"'Tis a jewel of a girl you are, Carmencita. Would you have your mother tell her that I'm here to take her away; and to wait and watch at her window. Some night I'll send her a song of cheer in the four hoots of the dwarf-owl. Then I'll wait a while and send the same again."

"And will that mean much to her, señor?"

"*Quien sabe?* It will tell her I am on the job."

"Who knows, you ask me? My friend, Micky Malone, you are a very great man, but you have much to learn of women. I have seen her eyes grow big, like winter moons, when she talked of you. And I know the sign. You have murdered her girlhood and made her a woman of dreams."

"And she's a-caring for the likes of me?"

"The she-wolf knows the strange fire, which we call the will o' the wisp, and does not mistake it for the sunrise. And the heart of a girl who has worked in a dance-hall knows the light of love from the glare of the devil. I can tell you this, Micky."

"Then what is it that you'd have me do?"

"Stay here and hide, on this side of the hills, and do not show yourself. Have you food?"

"Enough for three days."

"That will be plenty. By a big, bare, granite slab, half a mile from here, is a spring, behind it is a little park where there will be grass for your horses. Stay there, and when the sun is risen look down at these adobes. Before the end house you will see a fence and over this, when the time is ripe, I shall hang my stockings."

"Huh?" he questioned in amaze.

"For every one you see hanging there, you will count an hour of the night. At such a time you will bring your horses to a spot where you can find them, and then come to me."

N HOUR later Carmencita rode up to the tavern where Pinky and his gang were having a night of song and revel. Flinging herself into the very madness of a dance, she twisted up to a slim youth.

"Juan, you were telling me, some days ago, that you knew this Micky Malone had killed a man in Texas," she said.

"*Ai*, for a truth; I saw it and brought it to Pablo. It was this very thing which led him to his death, the fool."

"You soft-spoken little breaker-of-women's-hearts, you don't believe that I was in love with that gringo, do you?"

"They that saw you dance said that you were, and that you led him away from the town."

"Fool! Pablo was a runt and fat and sour. But you——"

"But what?"

"I have wine in my house. A bottle from Victoria; and many pounds of sweet gringo-candy and a guitar, and——"

"Pinky," yelled Juan, "Carmencita has some things which must indeed be investigated. So I'll bid you, brothers of mine, good night."

Laughing, he opened the side door and Carmencita passed before him into the night.

Pinky sneered as his follower left the room.

"That kid," he said in utter scorn, "is like a bar of soap that's laid in the water for a week."

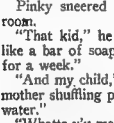
"And my child," screeched Carmencita's mother shuffling past the table, "is like the water."

"Whatta y'u mean?" snapped Pinky McKim.

"Like water changes soap, so does my beautiful *chica* make jelly of the bones of men. *Ai*, and their putty hearts, as well."

And her shrill laughter sounded in the room like a curse.

VII



LL night, to the soft, silver murmur of a flowing silver stream Mazie repeated over and over in her mind the conversation she had had with Carmencita before Pinky came back to the table and conducted himself so churlishly that the dancer left.

She knew that the girl had promised to assist her, but how was this help to be consummated? As soon as the peppery chicken and *frijoles* had been eaten and washed down with sips of hot champagne, Pinky had taken her to a rear room of the public-house, where he introduced her to two old women. Then he escorted her to a single-room adobe, ventilated by one barred window and a heavy iron-wood door, which contained a small opening in an upper panel. The place was clean and equipped with a small couch, a table and two chairs.

After removing her boots and loosening her waist, she threw herself on the bed and peered at the dimly lighted patch of sky discernible through her window. Stars wandered across this meager spot of the heavens, twinkled for a time, then passed on and out of the picture. Her thoughts were as these; flashing, for a spell, in a connected trend, then disappearing. The hours dragged by; and then came the croon of a distant guitar and the faint sound of men and women laughing in the *taberna*.

Occasionally she was conscious of the soft padding of bare feet on the baked earth outside her room. Then a face would appear at the small aperture in the door, linger for an instant, withdraw, and the moonlight would streak through upon her bed; the padding feet would die away, in the distance, and the guitar would croon on. Mazie's mind filled with thoughts of Micky and it seemed to her that she could hear the *clippety clop, clippety clop* of running hoofs and could see his splendid chestnut flashing like a streak of gold in the moonlit sands of the desert. He was coming!

Soon she heard a man singing a Spanish song and a woman's voice mingled with it when the refrain was reached. The words she translated automatically to the tender passion of the air's intangible and hidden beat. The voice she recognized as Carmencita's.

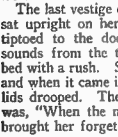
"Wait, but a little while, by love;
Wait, but a day—but an hour.
Wait, till the sad, sweet stars above
Shine into your stilly bower.
Wait, till the dawn comes breathing,
Wait, till the day is young,
Wait, till you hear lips wreathing
The sweetest tale e'er sung—Oh, dearie——

When the moon is sailing,
And the owls are wailing,

And the old, gray women smile in dreams
of youth;
Then my song goes winging,
Then my lips are singing,
Then shall hearts be ringing
With life's olden, golden truth."

Out of the somber shadows of her room, it seemed to Mazie that a mellow light appeared and in its rainbow heart the face and deep, pool-like eyes of Carmencita were staring at her kindly. What did it mean? Was it the song? Again she heard the haunting croon, the insistent, melodious alto of the girl. Now, the words meant something. A flush stole along the listening girl's cheeks; a glow crept through her breast and instinctively she smiled and knew that her eyes were wide and wondering. Was Carmencita singing that song for her? Yes, that was it! She was trying to console her. That repetition of the word wait, had in itself all the promise of an assurance.

The last vestige of fatigue left her. She sat upright on her couch, then arose and tiptoed to the door. The jarring mirth sounds from the tavern sent her back to bed with a rush. She listened for the song and when it came it lulled her and her eyelids drooped. The last thing she recalled was, "When the moon is sailing." Sleep brought her forgetfulness.



UNDER the limb-covered *jacal*, which served Carmencita as a porch, the slim figure of Juan lay, head against the adobe wall, body half fallen, legs drawn up. Under each other and by his side lay a large bottle of strong liquor and a smaller container of champagne. Carmencita had done her work well; the youthful brigand had succumbed to her wiles and her wine and was now sound asleep.

Down at the inn the revelry went on madly. The concertina screeched a little less wildly, the cornet was now still, but the coarse voices of the men roared on and mingled with these was the swish of dancing feet.

Just before the distant peaks changed their somber outlines for sharp points of gold and lilac, and the streaming east grew flaming bright with inconceivable color, the tired dancing-girl sat down beside the sleeping youth and with a slender hand drew a small slip of paper from his brilliant sash. This she spread upon the fluffy stuff of her dancing dress and read its words at a glance.

Diego Oliveros—
Greeting.

You will prepare the old cave on Wagon Mound for the occupancy of a woman. Also get together thirty of your men from Guzman. The bearer of this will tell you why and when I want to use the cave and when I will come.

It bore a crude sketch of a human eye as a signature.

Carmencita smiled and placed the note back in the sash. Then she went to her room and changed her dress. When broad daylight flooded the valley she walked to the *taberna* and whistled; from a side door her old mother reeled and with a grimace took her daughter by the arm and walked with her to their home.

"You told me, mother of me," began the girl, "that you would not drink heavily. And now, what have you done?"

"Is that fool outside asleep?"

"*Ai*, never will he be more dead and live."

"Then listen. I poured the good liquor from my bottle and filled it at the well. Then I sat in a corner and listened. I tell thee, that man Pinky is the devil himself."

"What did you hear?"

"It was said, as you left the room with Juan, that you were making love to him and that he had ambitions for McKim's leadership; that with your money he would now no longer obey the gringo. I tell thee, child, that man of the North is a beast. The more he drank the more he brooded. That witch of a daughter to old hair-lip Ramon tried to play with him and he nearly tore off her ear between his thumb and first finger. Since three o'clock he has been sitting in a corner drinking with the older men. I fear, my child, that when his brain turns to the girl, that——"

"Is it not time for you to relieve Anita?"

"*Ai*, but I fear for my old bones if he comes when I am there and he should try to enter the room."

"Have no fear. Go to the girl and tell her that I have seen Micky. That he is safe and when she hears, tonight, the hoot of an elfin-owl, four times, and then again four times, that it will be him signaling that all is right with him. Tell her that I saw love in his eye. Love for her. Tell her this, Mother, while I go——"

"For the love of the Virgin, what would you do?"

"Go to Pinky McKim and braid roses in his hair. I know the way to handle men who are mad with drink."

The old woman shuffled out of the room. In a moment, after she had received the keys from the night guard, she stood outside of Mazie's door, whispering to a white face that peered into her eyes.

"Señor Micky is hidden close by, and, tonight, when you hear the small owl of the desert and mountain, it will be him singing a song only the two of you know. Four times will he hoot and then four times more. All love is sad, my child, and it is proper that he convey to you his emotion in the voice of the bird of night. Sleep, now. After a while I shall bring you food."

CARMENCITA came into the door where the men and women were in the last stages of their frolic and went directly to the spot where McKim sat staring malevolently into the sunlight through a front window.

"I was a fool," she opened, leaning against the table before Pinky, "but 'tis not the first time."

McKim's hand gestured as though he would pull her from her place, then fell back to his knee and his face cracked with a horrible grin.

"And why the disgust?" he asked.

"One moment, *mi Capitan*," she smiled, separating a thin-stemmed rosebud and reaching for his immense shock of sandy hair. "If I am to be a soldier in this company, I want the colors to show. The rose is the emblem of love and song and loyalty and—blood. There!" A rose nestled beauteously in his muddy hair.

Toward middle morning Carmencita took him by the hand and led him to her home and, without saying a word, pointed to the crumpled figure of Juan.

Pinky leaped over the fence, rushed to the sleeping youth and with his quirt lashed him fiercely about the legs, face, head and body. Screaming in agony the frail figure arose and, shielding his head, tried to rush past the infuriated beast plying the cutting leather.

"I'll teach you to get drunk when I give you work to do," shouted McKim. "Where is that order?"

"Here!" wailed the boy and drew forth the paper the girl had read. "She," he said pointing at Carmencita, "gave me two kinds of wine and it made me drunk."

"But you have delayed me. You should have been thirty miles away by this hour. Go, you fool!"

Stumblingly the boy ran toward a long, squat mud-stable.

"Now," said Carmencita, entering her home, "I can talk to a man."

"You devil, if I thought you would double-cross me," smiled Pinky, standing from her and devouring her with his ominous eye, "I would——"

"What would you do?" she said petulantly.

"Feed you to the ravens, after I had dragged you to the desert at the end of my rope."

"If I thought that," she replied, "I would tickle your heart with this," and she tapped the pearl handle of a dainty dagger.

"Spoken like a man," McKim answered. "Now we understand each other."

"Show me you can be a man and I'll show you the way to be king of all these hills," she snapped.

"If you'll throw in with me and loan me a little money to get a good bunch of men and horses together—I'll——"

"Show me. I don't want words."

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Go in that room and get some sleep. When you are sober, then maybe we shall plan. Do I share in the *pesos* from the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S?"

"Share? Of course you share. Wake me at three o'clock," he said, walking into the next room.

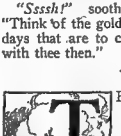
"*Ai*, and I'll have a cup of fresh goat's milk for thee."

Then she hurried to her mother's room.

"God has forgotten me, Mother," she wailed, burying her face in the folds of her mother's *mantilla*.

"*Ssssh!*" soothed the old woman. "Think of the gold you have and the long days that are to come. All will be well with thee then."

VIII



THERE was a smear of dirty rose color in the corner of the sky, to the northwest; the air was inert, specked here and there with smoky mists tinged with the purple of bruised flesh. Off to the south a miserable lavender,

gashed with brazen high-lights leered back at the eye, with almost human impudence. Storm clouds were forming and the desert was cringing like a boy about to be whipped. It had a right to wince; rain was coming!

When rain hits the wastelands of Mexico it changes them to lakes of mud, sometimes miles in extent; the dry watercourses run bank-full with a dirty, repulsive stream that arises from no place and sinks into the thirsty earth, God knows where. Banks crumple, mesas are cut, cliffs seamed and scarred as though an insatiable hate had been chiseling there. And then—the sun.

Wild-flowers, blooming cacti, purple acres of greasewood, creosote-bush, ocatilla, sahuaro, and bees, swarms of bees. After these, birds by day and owls by night and the screech of the passionate and cannibalistic goat-suckers, which fly in pairs and scream their love-cries madly. Mistletoe and doves.

Now the air was heavy with the promise of the storm.

Bony, gaunt-lined, dog-like cows moved in strings out of the desert to the edges of the hills. Rattlesnakes were seeking higher levels and all the playgrounds of the heat were waiting. Some legerdemain of the eye, some trickery of vast, dim vistas of devilish refraction and reflection distorted the earth and sky into grotesque and fanciful shapes. Shapes of fortresses, castles built on the high tops of intangible plateaus, ships sailing the mid-air, upside down; walls, watch-towers, moats, purling streams and pastoral lands, lake dotted and filled with green and inviting shade.

Some legerdemain, indeed! The Indians said it was the place where the living-dead practised the high arts of the damned to lure men to their dooms. One soul enticed beyond mortal aid meant that another soul, which had been marooned there, would be freed. The Yaquis knew these tales and laughed at them—the Yaquis, and the dirty-beaked buzzards and the slippery coyote.

The living-dead, if such there were, would stay in bondage for all time before a Yaqui—and for that matter, some of the wise Mexicans and Americans—could be lured by such infantile tricks of ghosts. Too many graves there were, out there, marked with worm-eaten weathered crosses and piled high with garish stones. These were marks of folly and lessons the old men always pointed out to the young.

All day the rendezvous of the *bandidos* under McKim lay immobile in the swelter; all day Micky Malone watched the flat roofs and brown patches of quasi-streets for signs of men. Save for a single figure occasionally, he saw nothing alive, except ridiculous looking cocks running stiff-legged about, crowing feverishly and ever calling hard-working hens about them.

Night fell. Lights appeared. A coolness came into the air and stars popped magically into the sky. A sickish moon, mist-ringed and leering, looked down upon the tortured earth.

At nine o'clock the tall cowboy slid down the mountain and imitated the mournful wail of the miniature owl. Four times he sent his voice over the still bottom-land and repeated the cry. Then he strained his eyes at the cluster of shadowy oblongs and saw, or thought that he saw, a wink of light. He waited interminably and hooted once more. Again the winking and this time it came five times, rapidly. His heart pounded; a smile played around his lips; he plucked savagely at the leaves of a sage-bush and then, as though he wanted all the world to hear his challenge or his exultation, he raised his voice and sent forth into the night the whistling song of the whippoorwill.

He retraced his steps and before midnight settled into a soft spot of moss and twigs and went to sleep.

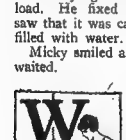
At dawn he awoke and watched the earth unfold its colors, like a mighty panorama worked on gigantic canvases by supernatural engines. There would be another unfolding soon, he reflected, a smaller revelation, a more important display. Stockings hanging in a row on a fence. That sight would be worth a thousand sunrises, for did it not mean, after all, the birth of a new day to him? A new day and—Mazie.

Then a depression fell upon his mind, a miasmic, murderous thought of gloom. John Sutter and his endless notices plastered from hell to breakfast. The sun, slanting across the earth, cast the shadow of an enormous cross, which marked a burial-ground on a high hill, in such a way that Micky fancied it to be a gallows. He dropped his eyes and rubbed his neck unconsciously. The idea of death, for the first time in his life, was a fearful thing; especially the thought of death, by dropping feet first through a trap-door and dancing on the air.

His eyes found Carmencita's adobe and remained fixed upon it. After a very long time he saw shapes of women moving

around in the dust and men emerging from doors and ponies going to the creek; then, at the side of the dancing girl's house, he saw a tiny figure staggering under a heavy load. He fixed his glass upon it and saw that it was carrying a washtub partly filled with water.

Micky smiled and rolled a cigarette and waited.



WHEN Carmencita awoke she refreshed herself at the well and went immediately to her own home and changed her dress for a riding-costume, then set about making breakfast for the detestable being she saw, through an open door, reclining on her bed.

When she had laid the table and prepared coffee, her mother brought a pail full of cool goat's milk. Filling a glass, the girl went to Pinky's side and gently woke him.

"Let the milk of a mountain-goat bring thee back to earth," she said naïvely, proffering him the glass. "It will do thee more good than all the folly-fire of *aguardiente*."

The use of the Spanish term of affection was abhorrent to her; yet, in her manner of speech and attitude, the brigand saw nothing to arouse his fears. He drank the milk at a gulp and swung his long legs to the floor. Carmencita vanished from the room and in a moment he joined her. She brought him a clean towel and when he had bathed his enormous head and distorted face, he sat down at the table opposite her and ate breakfast. During the meal he was strangely silent and fixed his hideous eye on her face as though with the power of penetration he would read her mind.

"I'm a-thinkin'," he said in English, "that if this yere thing between me and you is dead square that I'm what you might call a lucky hombre."

While she had worked about the house she had determined that she would gamble on McKim's memory failing him as to the events of the night before; now she made a desperate lunge into chance.

"Are you forgetting so soon the words of last night?"

"What words?"

"*Ai*, indeed, what words. I thought as much."

Her pretty lips curled in a pout; her eyes dropped to her plate; and, supreme actress that she was, she caused a look of sheer chagrin to spread across her features. Her very posture bespoke disappointment.

"Well, what words, I was askin' you?" he repeated quickly.

"You promised to send Mother to Guzman today and then—you and I were to go together when you left there with the boys."

For sometime she felt his eyes upon her face.

"If that old dame of yours wants to make Guzman, tell her to get ready; I'll send her down after breakfast," he finally drawled in a vague, uncertain way. "But what's the idea of you a-goin' around with me? Tell me that, *querida*."

"If my man is to be a capitan of brave soldiers of fame, I want to be at his side, a *soldadera*. If the joy of my heart is to ride in the face of death, I want to be at his side, patting with the hands of love his *tortillas*, and keeping the fire of my heart under his pot of *frijoles* and *chili con polluelo;* and then, above all, I want——"

"Yes, you little beauty, go on."

"I want to be at his side when the fighting time is come; and when the dancing begins, and the women try to steal what belongs to me, I want to look such as they in the eye."

"Ha, ha, ha!" his laughter was spontaneity itself.

She leaped from the table, jarring the dishes; and, as she ran toward him, she jerked open her riding shirt and her poniard flashed in the air. He caught her hand.

"You laugh at me!" she screamed. "For that I will kill you!"

But he pulled her down to his knee and twisted her wrist till the dagger clattered to the floor.

"I laughed because I love you, you she-wildcat."

Carmencita's mother stood in the doorway.

"Oh, la, la, lu, lee, you are taming her, señor," she said in a whimsical tone of relief.

"Come here, you fool," cried Pinky, releasing the girl.

The old woman advanced inside the door.

"You want to go to Guzman, now?" he asked.

Carmencita flashed her mother a knowing look.

"*Ai*," replied the wrinkled hag.

"Very well, tell Leon to hook up the wagon and take you there."

"But my child?"

"She stays with me for a while. We will send for you later when there are fine, long, cool days ahead."

The stooped figure hurried from the room and soon they heard her quarreling with a stable-man at the barn. After a while a pair of burros were hitched to a rattletrap conveyance and Carmencita helped her mother load her meager apparel into the wagon.

"There is to be danger, Mother," she said, "and so I send you where you will be safe. Later I will join you."

"I have not lived among evil so many years not to know what is best for me; but you, my baby, you will be safe?"

"*Ai.*"

"We go!" shouted the driver, and the old woman climbed into the rig. "*Adios!*" she screamed.

"*Adios!*" waved Carmencita as she went back into the room where Pinky sat staring at her face.

"Now," she said, "tell me thy plans."

Pinky talked volubly and long, so that when he stopped she had learned that Mazie was to be moved early that evening and taken to the cave on Wagon Mound. The entire gang was to make the trip. Instantly Carmencita hurried toward her room.

"Hey," cried McKim, "what's the rush?"

Carmencita turned back.

"I must get some pretty things ready," she answered. "Now, you leave me alone. Leave me alone till this afternoon, for I have my washing to do and I want no man around to see soap on my arms."

She gathered a mass of hosiery together. This she threw into a tub and poured a pail of water over it. Then she walked out of doors and set the tub on a bench.

McKim came out after a moment and stood admiring the beauty of the girl as she bent over the tub swiftly washing a pair of stockings.

"Can I," asked Carmencita, swiftly, "go to that girl and take from her—something? I saw a bracelet and a watch; these would shine prettily on your *soldadera's* wrist."

"Take what you want," McKim agreed readily.

"Then tell Anita, when you pass her house; for, when my washing is done, I shall visit this girl."

Her voice contained a chill scorn, almost a note of loathing as she spoke the word girl.

When Pinky had entered and left Anita's house, and finally disappeared within the drinking adobe, Carmencita wrung out ten stockings and hung them over the fence and weighted them down with small pieces of rock. She raised her eyes along the mountain-side and searched the vicinity of the bald granite face for some sign of Micky. She fancied she discerned a small black object but she was not sure. Then she carried in the tub, dressed her hair, secreted a small derringer in the front of her dress, and walked to the cabin of old Anita.

"TONIGHT, *señorita*," said Carmencita swiftly, as she entered the room where Mazie lay on the couch, "you will be taken to Wagon Mound and placed in a cave. What the next move will be I can't say, but Micky will be here at ten and by that time I shall have a plan. Hide this derringer; and, if the time comes that you are in danger, shoot. There are two shells. You know how to use a gun?"

"Yes."

"And you will not be afraid?"

"No! Carmencita."

At that instant a horse dashed madly by the front of the adobe and Carmencita, running to the door, saw a rider leap from a saddle and run to McKim, who had rushed from the *taberna*.

"I must go," said she. "The rider, who was sent across the desert to your father, has returned twelve hours before he was expected. Something has happened."

She locked the door, returned the keys to Anita, and sauntered nonchalantly back to her home. In a few moments Pinky ran into the room.

"Get your things together quick!" he shouted. "I'm taking the girl away, right now."

"What's the matter?" Carmencita asked in feigned amaze.

"When my man got to the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S there was no one there but an old woman. He gave her the note and she told him her man was out with a posse of his hands and four or five men of the Triple X outfit. She offered to give him the money if he would wait till she went to the railroad. Them punchers are headed this way and my guess is that we'll have hell a-popping on this bottom when they get here. Now, get ready to slide out and I'll be back with your pony in a minute."

"My dear," she said, calm and resolute,

"would you leave a few old men and women with water for blood, back here to sell you out for a bottle or two of drink? If I am to be your woman and you my man, then here is where I belong—and here is where I stay!"

"What?"

"I shall remain and lead these gringo dogs away from you, even on into Sonora. The rain will come tonight and then—Oh, never fear, I know the way. I shall tear out when they come in and before night every burro and pony in this valley will be driven over the ridge. That will make a trail! Then, when they arrive, I shall lead them a merry dance."

McKim grinned.

"You're one in a million, Carmencita," he acknowledged. "Don't you worry none about us losing the price of this girl. I know where she'll bring a good lump of gold and you'll take her there and get the wad. It shall be yours, all of it."

"No. Not for me. Not one *peso*. I'll buy *mi capitan* a suit of velvet and his hat shall be the envy of Mexico."

An hour later a small cavalcade, led by a light buckboard carrying Mazie and McKim, wound its dusty way out of the gulch and up the sides of a barren slope.

At that moment Micky, sweeping the desert with his glasses, from the top of the ridge, saw a high column of dust whirling like a water-spout to the sky and traveling toward him rapidly.

"Sure, and that's a good luck sign, too," he mused. "I'll be stopping them leather-pounders before these greasers get a slant at them and hide out Mazie."

He saddled Barney and rode down the opposite slope.

IX

MICKY rode boyishly through the pines, his mind racing with the innocent insolence of his dreaming. He smelled combat in the air, and saw help and strength coming toward him across the sand. He judged there were at least thirty riders in that band, he had seen through his glasses, loping his way. This must be so, or how could they raise so great a spiral of dust?

He had seen the ten stockings on the fence, and thought the designated hour to be most delightful; for, in the cool of the evening, when the Mexicans would be lulled to credulous safety by wine and song, he would come into town. Now, with those men out there, who were riding in obedience to his note, the trick would be nothing but a push-over; thus he mused as he rode.

His was a fine character, brittle as glass, but finely spun, elastic, ready to snap; yet, with obviously sustaining qualities. He was a bit of Western frontiersman glazed over with the polish of a *chevalier;* he was Kit Carson, Walter Raleigh and Buffalo Bill rolled into one.

The dense trees hid the desert, after a while, and likewise the horsemen dashing toward him. As he was rounding an abrupt corner of the forest where he knew he would obtain a glimpse of the flat sandy expanse, he heard a sharp crackling sound and the next instant looked into a pair of guns. Then the muzzles dropped and two smiling eyes flashed into his own.

Hank, from the Triple X outfit, stood, dust-begrimed, in the trail.

"How in the world—?" began Micky.

"Don't cross-examine me, bo," returned the cowboy. "Unsling that water and let me gurgle y'u a real tune."

When his thirst was satisfied he handed back the canteen with a long drawn sigh.

"I been a-layin' up yere since last midnight, afraid to move," he declared. "Where y'u been?"

"On the other side. I was hiding out too. Carmencita is down at a bunch of adobes and has given me a signal to sneak in to her tonight at ten. How come you to know about me?"

"Carmencita sent Shorty word that Pinky was goin' to get y'u, so some of us persuadin'-babies slipped oveh and joined in with Mr. Buchanan. We sort o' felt maybe we could help square up with y'u for that cold-deck we sprung on y'u down in Victoria. Hell's popped plumb an' blown the butts off."

"And?"

"Garcia has busted loose down at Chihuahua an' some of his gang are headin this way from Hermosillo. They's another insurrection on. This border's goin' to singlefoot, canter and lope in a little while!"

"Sure, Hank, me boy, and it's like a newspaper you are. Maybe the two of us'll be right happy to join up with the gang that's coming out there. I was a-riding to meet them."

"Where?! What gang?"

"Come on and lay your eye on that dust

ert. There's a bunch of dust-kickers sliding this way like a double-header cow-train."

They rode off down the trail till they came to an open spot, from which the desert could be swept for miles. And there, directly under them, the approaching horsemen were distinctly visible. Hank laughed.

"If I had about a good sixteen-ounce snort of Andy's glucose I could get jocose, *muy pronto*," he chuckled.

Micky stared at the sight which met his gaze.

"Was you thinkin' them runt bronces was Triple X ponies?" asked Hank. "Wait till I tell Old Man Massey. Why, them movin' ring-bones was smooth mouthed when Fremont came back from California. They ain't nothin' but a piece of hide to set a saddle on. Who'd you think was a-comin'?"

"Our gang."

"Man, our crowd's a-layin' up on the north fork of the old wagon-road from Guzman. I was to sift you out of these trees, then ride an' corral our boys an' we'd start smokin' accordin' to yore orders. What'll we do now?"

"High tail off this slope and let them go by," said Micky. "Then tonight I'll ride into town, alone, and see what Carmencita has to say."

"You will in a pig's valise. I'm the lonesomest waddie in the world, when I'm alone and sober. I'll be rubbin' yore elbow when you talk to that girl. Hell, I'm a little sweet on her myself. Looka yonder! See that flag? That means 'ag'in the government.' That's Liberty movin' out o' them sands. Come on."

They secreted themselves and heard the miserable company of Mexican horsemen go by. From snatches of chatter passed back from the head of the column they learned that the *insurrectos* expected to gather fresh horses, over the mountain, and push on to Guzman that night. This altered Hank's plan to remain with Micky.

When the soldiers had disappeared, he told Micky exactly how to reach the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S and Triple X boys, and when night fell he mounted and rode away. He was on a mission of warning to the men hiding on the road. Micky retraced his steps to the granite outcrop, fixed a lead-rope to his extra horse and waited till nearly nine o'clock, then went down the mountain, tied up his animals in a thicket of willows, and crept into town, winding his way to Carmencita's house.

IT WAS dark. Softly he tapped on a window, then a door opened and he stepped inside.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes," Carmencita replied, just as Micky heard a raucous chorus of voices arise from the public-house.

There came the sound of jangling sabers, the moving of horses' feet, and a commanding shout burst through the still air with a ridiculous intonation—the soldiers were moving out of town.

"Where is she?" asked Micky.

"Not here."

"What?"

"Pinky moved her today. Come, I am going with you. Have you a horse for me?"

"Yes."

"Good! Here's my saddle. Now, let's run. By keeping to the right, down this gully back of us, we can reach the creek unseen. Micky——?"

Something in the way the name was uttered struck deeply into Malone's consciousness, upsetting the numbness that had stilled him when he heard that Mazie had been moved.

"And what's troubling you, little one?" he asked.

"I told her what I had seen in your eyes the other night, and I wish that you could have caught the light that flashed in her face. There's yellow gold running in the veins of you two people—yellow gold, and even I am jealous. Let that confidence put speed in your horse when we get clear of those monkeys out there."

"Speaking of gold, Carmencita, never was there the likes of you, even in a dream."

"Come on," she said and pushed past him.

Micky flung the saddle which she had placed in his arms over his shoulder and softly closed the door. They ran to the horses, saddled, and dashed down the creek bottom, the girl in the lead. As the moon came out and the town could no longer be seen, Micky rode to her side and as she looked into his face he saw that she had been weeping.

"Why the tears?" he asked tenderly.

"Back there in the house," she answered. "I don't know what it was, but it seemed that in your voice I heard the murmur of something strange. Only once before have I heard it and it made me sad. I am very

young, Micky, and very hungry—and old age is so far away."

That was all, but the big mellow heart of the boy went suddenly more mellow and he reached out his hand and clasped her fingers, which had been laid in the roll of her saddle.

Then came the rain.

A living quality sailed through the air; strange long shafts of wan moonlight played over the waste and a darting battalion of wraithlike arabesques danced on the grotesque granite ledges. Veritable sheets of water fell from the sky to the earth and Micky unloosed his slicker and held it for the girl. As he buttoned it around her neck and fastened the bottoms about her legs, a trick of the moon sprayed the scene with a moist and silver light. In her eyes he saw something almost holy, and as he looked, her lip quivered and he saw that she was trembling in the throes of a vast emotion.

The curtain of clouds obscured the moon and darkness fell about them like an unimagined gloom.

Five hours later and they came out of the scrub-pine and, slipping and sliding down a loose shale slope, cantered along a rut filled road, now running deep with a flowing ooze.

Ahead of them they saw a dark tree-like mass and the next instant a voice rang out.

"Halt!"

"I'd know that tongue if I heard it in me grave," answered Micky. "Make way, Shorty; I have a lady with me!"

"Is she Miss Buchanan?"

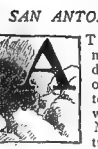
In the body of the interminable drip and sough of the rain Micky thought he heard a sharp, quick sob. It came from the dark wall of the road's bank where Carmencita rode.

"No," he answered. "Miss Mazie is held a prisoner at Wagon Mound. How many are there of you boys?"

"Twenty-seven; an' they're rarin' to begin pumpin' hot bad-luck to somebody. When do we start and where do we go?"

"We must cross this rim off to the east," said Carmencita softly, "and drop down on the lava-beds above the cave. There I will leave you boys and, with Micky, I'll go into McKim's camp. You get the rest of your men and follow us up this hill."

Shorty fled away in the dark. The sound of his pony's feet, slopping through the mire, was like that of a horse heard running in a dream.



AT FOUR o'clock Carmencita wound her way down the slippery sides of a streaming hill toward a point of rocks which she had told Micky held the entrance to the cave.

She had arranged with the cowboy to signal him when there arose the necessity of his coöperation in the rescue of Mazie; and, as she walked over the hard surface of the rock, which once had been a flowing stream of molten lava, she often raised her voice in a low, sharp cry of greeting.

"*Quien viene?*" rang out a quick challenge.

"Carmencita, you fool! Why have you not halted me before?"

"The dark, señorita. One cannot see, and all sound is killed by the fall of the rain. Proceed."

"*Ai*, proceed, indeed! Run to Pinky, thou boy, and tell him I have grave tidings. *Insurrectos* are coming!"

When she clambered down to the barricade before the entrance to the cave, a lantern had been lit and McKim stood in the circle of its light.

"What's this I hear about *insurrectos?*" he asked.

"Pepillo Lorenzo, with man *galopos* from Hermosillo, is on his way here. Garcia has at last moved, and that dancing-master butcher Lorenzo swears he will take the girl from thee. He has need for such money as she will bring, and he said that, if she were pretty, a mule should carry a tent for him."

A curse died in McKim's throat.

"How far behind youare they?" he asked.

"How can I tell? They have old Ricardito guiding them. That bowlegged snipe swears the good God played you into his hands as a revenge for the slap you gave his cheek last week, when his sore tooth was setting him wild."

"Where's your pony?"

"Up there in the trees. Do you think, my Pinky, a horse could walk the lava?"

"How many in the band?"

"Eighty, and every man is riding a good horse. They will come fast; but around by the road. Ricardito does not know the trails the goats travel. I am here ahead of them by a good hour."

"What you say is true?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Her answering laughter contained more contempt than hilarity in it; it was as though she had jeered at a fool or a knave.

Without further reply, she attempted to push past him toward a large chamber where members of the band had risen to their feet. McKim caught her hand and swung her around as she went by him.

"Why do you laugh at me?" he snarled.

"Because, thou fool, thou hast the mind of a magpie. I want that girl, as you promised. I want her out of this death-trap and away to the top of the ridge so that, when the sun comes up and the killing of thee and thy men is filling this gulch with the song of the devil, I can be on my way to Guzman. Pooh!" she snapped her fingers, in his face. *"Mi capitan* has turned into a chicken. He is afraid of women-killers."

McKim dropped her arm.

"You would take her alone?" he demanded, a chill note of inquiry in his voice. "Do you think I am a fool?"

"Alone? No, not alone. I want thee with me and some of your best men. Two will do. The rest may stay here and fight Pepillo, while we make away with the girl."

A murmur ran through the members of the band; a whisper of startled amaze it was and men shuffled in their tracks. Pinky was not slow to see that he was on trial and hurried to establish confidence.

"You, Gualterio, and you, Mauricio, get your ponies and one for the girl and follow Carmencita. I stay with my men to talk or fight with this bloodletting blue stocking and to make terms with him for the spoils of this region. These mountains belong to you, my children, and no man, soldier or civilian, can come through them and steal without paying a visit to me."

A huzzah arose at this brave talk. Two slim young riders left the cave and secured their horses.

"Now, Carmencita," said Pinky indulgently, his voice bereft of its former tone, "the girl is back there to the left. I will go with you to see that you are safe. Then I shall come back here."

"That is very kind, my brave man, my ——"

She caught his hand and squeezed it and dragged him after her.

Flinging open a rough hewn door, she saw Mazie sitting on the floor of a damp chamber, beside a sputtering candle. The American girl gave vent to her surprise in a sharp intake of breath but evinced no other sign of consternation.

Pinky spoke first.

"I'm turnin' you over to this girl," he said, "an' you gotta behave or the men who are to take you away will drop you on the road. There's Mexican soldiers hustlin' here for you, and I will have to fight them to let Carmencita get you out of danger. Will you be good?"

"Yes."

"Come then, and don't stand there like a dead goose," shot Carmencita, "we shall see if a gringo woman has red blood in her body."

She jerked Mazie toward the entrance roughly, and, as they passed Pinky and came into the dim outer quarters of the cave she gave the girl's hand a warm pressure of assurance.

From one of the men Carmencita grasped a poncho and this she flung about Mazie, then went out into the rain, Pinky and the girl following her. The two men who had been detailed to bring her horses were already winding around the lava-beds. In the east a dirty light was streaking the opaque sky. With remarkable speed the two girls floundered across the cutting edges of the volcanic stone, McKim lumbering with much effort a few paces to their rear.

When they had reached the fringe of the lava and the trees were but a short distance away, Carmencita suddenly turned to Mazie.

"When I cry out, you run toward that heavy clump of piñon," she whispered.

Then a flood of light streamed everywhere. Day had come. The rain ceased to fall and a light breeze sprang up which had a breath of chill in its teeth.

"Guardarse!" cried Carmencita and the word "beware" sounded like the scream of an eagle.

Pinky stopped still in his tracks. As he saw the two girls each run in different directions, he reached for his gun, but, before his hand had traveled half-way to his holster, under his slicker, he heard a voice shout, "Stick 'em up!" and his arms flew above his head.

Micky arose from a tangle of fallen slabs and advanced close to the side of McKim. Swiftly he tore open Pinky's slicker and jerked two guns from their holsters; then he headed the outlaw down the lava field and stood watching him as he fled. When a shelter of heavy rock was reached Pinky dropped behind it.

"Scatter and get these fellows up here," he shouted to his men. "The trees are full of them."

Micky hastened to the timber, where Carmencita and Mazie were untying the horses.

Carmencita placed Mazie on the horse

she had ridden and was about to turn into the trees on foot when Micky touched her on the shoulder.

"Sure," he said with a smile, "and if Barney can't carry the two of us, he'll get no grain for a month of Sundays."

Then he sprang to the saddle, twisted a stirrup for her to mount, and she leaped to a seat behind him. Rapidly the two horses dashed through the trees.

As they fled they were passed by men on foot running toward the lava-beds. Soon the sharp crack of rifle fire was heard and then Micky delivered the women to a cowboy who had been left in charge of the ponies. Leaping from Barney, he hurried down the slope and joined the men of the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S and the Triple X.

A cheer came from the coverts of Pinky's men and suddenly out of the timber, at a far point of the gulch, a column of horsemen appeared, riding fast and scattering toward the broken rocks of the ridge where Mazie's captors had secreted themselves.

Pepillo's men had arrived and there were eighty of them.

X

THE cowboys from the two American ranches settled themselves about the lava-beds in a wide half-moon, and soon the business-like method of their attack made itself felt. Mexicans who had the temerity to show themselves paid for their folly with their lives or were wounded so that they went out of action.

The miserable detachment of *insurrectos* was so hotly beset, when it arrived on the scene, that it sought cover at once, leaving its horses to drift aimlessly about on the slope of the hill.

"I'm a-thinking," said Micky to Hank Hudnut, "that our best bet is to concentrate on the crowbaits of them babies over there. Besides doing a humane thing, we'll be putting a lot of them on foot, when we want to slide out of here."

Hank passed this advice along the line and soon the saddle-horses of the greasers were being destroyed; more than thirty of them fell in the first few seconds and twenty-five more during the course of the next half hour. The remainder of the bunch, now badly frightened, disappeared over the ridge and galloped away.

"I got one," yelled Hank after a while, "an' if I'm not a-missin' fire on my prognostications, I'm about to obtain another."

Boo-oy!

His short carbine spoke and a good four hundred yards away a man rolled from behind a rock, frantically clutching a spot on his leg near a thigh.

The Mexicans were all over-shooting; the manner in which they were wasting ammunition was pitiful. Micky smiled as he saw a *vaquero* belonging to McKim slide out a sombrero as though a head were under it.

"Hank," he said, "if you'll be dropping one of them sure-cure pills of yours to that rock on the left of that head-basket, I'm a-thinking she'll spill and spit enough hot lead in the neighborhood to twist that feller so that I can get a wham at him from this side."

Hank's carbine spoke and a red and green streak appeared four feet to the right of the spot where the ball spattered on the smooth perpendicular surface of a boulder. Micky was squinting across his sights and, as his gun cracked, a figure leaped out from behind the sombrero and tumbled down the hill.

"They're a-goin' to break for that rim above us!" yelled one of the Two Bar Diamond Lazy S hands. "Slough-foot says he heard McKim give the order."

"There they start," announced another, and from behind rocks thirty or forty men hurriedly arose, on the opposite slope, and started up the hill.

They appeared to move with the slow speed of ants and many of them slipped and sprawled about on the wet surface of the rocks. The rifles of the cowboys stopped about a third of them. The rest, discouraged at their progress over the greasy stone, slid back to their abandoned coverts.

The leader of the *insurrectos* at this point shouted orders to some of his men to make a dash for the stock which had been dispersed. Three men sprang up the hill and as quickly returned to their hiding-places. Bullets flecked bits of stone around them so fast that they lost heart immediately. Then the leader ordered volley-fire and at the command the hillside broke into veritable nest of smoke. Every man on that incline revealed his position, as much so as if he had marked it with a waving flag. For a few minutes the Mexican fire was witheld; no head dare obtrude itself from the shelter of its stone.

Pepillo, becoming exasperated at the

check-mating he had received, suddenly arose, saber in hand. Waving it over his head, he ordered his men to follow him.

"Let him alone, boys!" yelled Micky. "I've got him covered and when he's just right I'll drop him. But let's see what he thinks he's going to do. I don't believe he understands all he knows about this sort of thing."

Pepillo continued to brandish his weapon, but to no avail. His men had had about all the fight taken out of them. Then, just as the grotesque figure swinging the blade was about to attempt a rush toward the spot where McKim was hiding, Micky dropped a ball at his feet and another behind him. The sword was brought down with a jerk; the officer whirled and started back to his barricade. But his empty scabbard tangled his legs and down went the spidery form, rolling sidewise on the rocky slope.

A guffaw went up from the Americans and even Pinky's men hurled anathema and epithet at the tumbling figure. When Pepillo succeeded in checking his fall he was entirely at the mercy of the cowboy rifles and not more than one hundred and fifty yards from them. Shorty, the Triple X foreman, ordered him to cross the ravine and ascend the slope as a prisoner, and the Mexican obeyed like a child. Shorty compelled the insurgent to sit down in front of him and sent the man to utter distraction by opening fire at his soldiers from a region directly beside his hip.

Soon the clouds began to settle in the narrow valley and the sun was partly obscured wallowing like a ball of dim fire in a gray smoke. Micky sent word along the line that, when the rain and mist shut out all sight of the opposite hill, the men were to make a sudden dash for their horses. Consequently, after an especially heavy discharge at the Mexicans and just as the clouds swooped down and shut off all objects more than twenty feet away, the cowboys ran for their ponies. Pepillo was hog-tied by Shorty and his own saber sash was stuffed in his mouth and twisted about his head as a gag.

Within a few moments the Americans rode away from the scene, escorting the two girls, and dashed out upon the desert in the direction of the American border. Micky with ten of the boys hung back to act as a rear-guard. Late that night Mazie led Carmencita to her mother and together they placed the silent and brooding dancing girl in the spare room of the ranch-house.

THE next morning, just before the Triple X rancher and his hands started for their home, Old Man Massie came up to Micky. "Micky Malone," he said, loudly enough so that all the cowboys and those within the ranch-house could hear him, "Mr. Buchanan an' I have been talkin' this yere thing over an' we've come to the conclusion that, whereas, there is a revolution a-goin' on less'n fifty miles from this outfit an' all us ranchers is in for several kinds of gilt-edged hell till it's plumb done, we're askin' y'u to take command of a bunch of men an' keep this boundary line cleaned up."

"I reckon you men are forgetting that killing back in Victoria," answered Micky wearily.

"Shucks!" yelled Massie. "Y'u makes me sick. Don't y'u know that we held the inquest that night an' the verdict was suicide?"

"Suicide?" questioned Micky.

"Uh-huh. We come to the decision that when Pablo slung a slug at you first, an' missed, that he didn't do nuthin' else but jest nacherly dutch hisself to death. But that ain't all! We assembled the grand-jury the week followin' an' brought in a no-bill verdict. Hank was on that jury, an' Shorty was the foreman. Shorty was pretty sore, too. Them jurymen took forty dollars away from him playin' stud while they was makin' up their minds about the verdict. Are y'u comin' along with us?"

"Wait a minute, Father; you and Mr. Massie come here," Mazie's voice sounded from the kitchen door.

Both of the old men followed her into the house and a moment later came out. Mazie then called to Micky, who walked toward her in great confusion.

"Carmencita wants to see you, Micky," she said to him, quietly. "She's in the front room."

As Micky entered the room where the little Mexican girl stood leaning against a window, she turned and stared at him out of wide, moist eyes.

"Micky," she said, slowly, taking one of his hands in hers, "I heard what they asked you to do, out there; and I want to tell you to accept. I know the men who are fighting my country and I know this border will bleed almost as much as my Mexico. Please, for my sake, help keep it safe."

"But, Carmencita, I'm wanted bad in

Texas, and I wouldn't last a week. They're after me back there and it's hate that's sending them on my trail. Bloody hate. I'm a-leaving in the morning and a-drifting a little farther west."

Quickly she reached up and drew down his head and kissed him on the cheek as a mother would have done.

"I wanted you to know," she said, "that I am grateful to you for what you have done for me and that——"

Her voice suddenly filled with a choking sob.

"And what was you about to say?" he asked kindly.

"That when you and Mazie are settled somewhere, and happy, that I'm coming to see you." Through her tears she smiled up into his face. "You don't think me a woman-butterfly do you?" she added.

"Sure, I think you a brick; and the man, the first-class twenty-four carat of man, as is lucky enough to have you making his *tortillas* for him will be in smiling luck all his life. But where do you get this talk about Miss Mazie and me. Sure——"

"Go, Micky; she's waiting outside that door and the woman heart in her sees in me what the big boy heart of you could never see. Good luck and may the Virgin protect you."

She walked into her bedroom and closed the door.

When he joined Mazie, Micky saw a strange light in her eyes. A laughing, querulous gleam it was, full of delight and the suggestion of banter.

"And what you grinning about?" he asked.

"I'm wondering if you really know how to——"

"Well? And what's the joke. Sure, between the two of you women, I'm stepping exactly on nothing all the time. I know I'm looking at a face I ain't been looking away from since a measly centipede introduced me to you. What is it you want to know?"

She stepped directly to his side, raised her face, closed her eyes, and blushed.

"If you know how to kiss a woman," she said.

And when the glory of that first embrace had ended Mazie flaunted a copy of the San Antone *Express* before Micky's eyes.

"Read that," she said, pointing to the top of the personal column. "Now you can't refuse to ride with the Triple X boys."

Micky's hands grasped the newspaper and his eyes devoured the notice, which read:

> Come on home, Micky Malone. The governor ousted John Sutter as sheriff, and the brand-inspector's office has sworn out warrants charging him with brand-altering. He escaped and is now a fugitive somewhere in Mexico. The coroner's office acquitted you of all blame the day following your flight. Come on back to Sweetwater; they want to give you a barbecue.
>
> CAPTAIN STUART.

"What are you thinking?" asked Mazie.

"This," he answered, as her mother opened the door and came into the room; he drew her to him and kissed her without the semblance of shame or confusion at the elder woman's presence.

"My!" said Mrs. Buchanan. "Pa was sure right. He said this morning, when he gave that paper to Mazie, that something was going to happen. Pa said he saw a scheming light in her eyes—and Pa sure knows women."

"Mother!" cried Mazie.

Then Micky, with an arm around the girl, opened the door.

"Whenever you boys are ready to ride I'm going with you," he shouted to Old Man Massie.

"And when you come back, I'll be waiting for you," the nestling girl looked up at him and whispered.

As the men rode away Hank Hudnut edged his pony close to Shorty's.

"I wonder why the hell some hombres gets all their luck in bouquets?" he pondered.

"Shut up!" replied Shorty. "Ain't I got a plumb plenty to think about, with the sight of that damn Micky's eyes, an' him a-smilin' an' a-lickin' his lips? Ain't I?"

"Listen!" said Hank. "If that fool ain't a-singin'——" And back at the ranch-house Mazie heard:

> "Her smil. is captivatin'
> She's the divil, in her eye,
> So, Mither, I'm in love today,
> And shall be till I die."

A Complete Western Novel Next Issue

GILA JOE

By Anthony M. Rud

COWBOYS*

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE

In essence the cowboy is the same today as he was in the days of the open range, and in the later years of which Mr. White is writing here. Only outwardly has his temperament changed with the march of civilization. Yet there are still many places where the old conditions prevail, and the cowboy is just as he is here described

YOUR cowboy is a species variously subdivided. If you happen to be traveled as to the wild countries, you will be able to recognize whence your chance acquaintance hails by the kind of saddle he rides, and the rigging of it; by the kind of rope he throws, and the method of the throwing; by the shape of hat he wears; by his twist of speech; even by the very manner of his riding. Your California "vaquero" from the Coast Ranges is as unlike as possible to your Texas cowman, and both differ from the Wyoming or South Dakota article. I should be puzzled to define exactly the habitat of the "typical" cowboy. No matter where you go, you will find your individual acquaintance varying from the type in respect to some of the minor details.

Certain characteristics run through the whole tribe, however. Of these some are so well known or have been so adequately done elsewhere that it hardly seems wise to elaborate on them here. Let us assume that you and I know what sort of human beings cowboys are—with all their taciturnity, their surface gravity, their keen sense of humor, their courage, their kindness, their freedom, their lawlessness, their foulness of mouth, and their supreme skill in the handling of horses and cattle. I shall try to tell you nothing of all that.

If one thinks down doggedly to the last analysis, he will find that the basic reason for the differences between a cowboy and other men rests finally on an individual liberty, a freedom from restraint either of society or convention, a lawlessness, an accepting of his own standard alone. He is absolutely self-poised and sufficient; and that self-poise and that sufficiency he takes pains to assure first of all. After their assurance he is willing to enter into human relations. His attitude toward everything in life is not suspicious, but watchful. He is "gathered together," his elbows at his side.

This evidences itself most strikingly in his terseness of speech. A man dependent on himself naturally does not give himself away to the first comer. He is more interested in finding out what the other fellow is than in exploiting his own importance. A man who does much promiscuous talking he is likely to despise, arguing that man incautious, hence weak.

Yet when he does talk, he talks to the point and with a vivid and direct picturesqueness of phrase which is as refreshing as it is unexpected. But to observe the riot of imagination turned loose with the bridle off, you must assist at a burst of anger on the part of one of these men. It is mostly unprintable, but you will get an entirely new idea of what profanity means. Also you will come to the conclusion that you, with your trifling damns, and the like, have been a very good boy indeed. The remotest, most obscure, and unheard of conceptions are dragged forth from earth, heaven, and hell, and linked together in a sequence so original, so gaudy, and so utterly blasphemous, that you gasp and are stricken with the most devoted admiration. It is genius.

*From "The Mountains," by Stewart Edward White.

In Arizona a number of us were sitting around the feeble camp-fire the desert scarcity of fuel permits, smoking our pipes. We were all contemplative and comfortably silent with the exception of one very youthful person who had a lot to say. It was mainly about himself. After he had bragged awhile without molestation, one of the older cowpunchers grew very tired of it. He removed his pipe deliberately, and spat in the fire.

"Say, son," he drawled, "if you want to say something big, why don't you say 'elephant?'" The young fellow subsided.

Down near the Chiracahua Range in southeastern Arizona, there is a butte, and halfway up that butte is a cave, and in front of that cave is a ramshackle porch-roof or shed. This latter makes the cave into a dwelling-house. It is inhabited by an old "alkali" and half a dozen bear dogs. I sat with the old fellow one day for nearly an hour. It was a sociable visit, but economical of the English language. He made one remark, outside our initial greeting. It was enough, for in terseness, accuracy, and compression, I have never heard a better or more comprehensive description of the arid countries.

"Son," said he, "in this country thar is more cows and less butter, more rivers and less water, and you kin see farther and see less than in any other country in the world."

Now this peculiar directness of phrase means but one thing—freedom from the influence of convention. The cowboy respects neither the dictionary nor usage. He employs his words in the manner that best suits him, and arranges them in the sequence that best expresses his idea, untrammeled by tradition. It is a phase of the same lawlessness, the same reliance on self, that makes for his taciturnity and watchfulness.

In essence, his dress is an adaptation to the necessities of his calling; as a matter of fact, it is an elaboration on that. The broad heavy felt hat he has found by experience to be more effective in turning heat than a lighter straw; he further runs to variety in the shape of the crown and in the nature of the band. He wears a silk handkerchief about his neck to turn the sun and keep out the dust, but indulges in astonishing gaudiness of color. His gauntlets save his hands from the rope; he adds a fringe and a silver star. The heavy wide "chaps" of leather about his legs are necessary to him when he is riding fast through brush; he indulges in such frivolities as stamped leather, angora hair, and the like. High heels to his boots prevent his foot from slipping through his wide stirrup, and are useful to dig into the ground when he is roping in the corral. Even his six-shooter is more a tool of his trade than a weapon of defense. With it he frightens cattle from the heavy brush; he slaughters old or diseased steers; he "turns the herd" in a stampede or when rounding it in; and especially is it handy and loose to his hip in case his horse should fall and commence to drag him.

So the details of his appearance spring from the practical, but in the wearing of them and the using of them he shows again that fine disregard for the way other people do it or think it.

Now in civilization you and I entertain a double respect for firearms and the law. Firearms are dangerous, and it is against the law to use them promiscuously. If we shoot them off in unexpected places, we first of all alarm unduly our families and neighbors, and in due course attract the notice of the police. By the time we are grown up we look on shooting a revolver as something to be accomplished after an especial trip for the purpose.

But to the cowboy shooting a gun is merely what lighting a match would be to us. We take reasonable care not to scratch that match on the wall nor to throw it where it will do harm. Likewise the cowboy takes reasonable care that his bullets do not land in some one's anatomy nor in too expensive bric-a-brac. Otherwise any time or place will do.

The picture comes to me of a bunkhouse on an Arizona range. The time was evening. A half-dozen cowboys were sprawled out on the beds smoking, and three more were playing poker with the Chinese cook. A misguided rat darted out from under one of the beds and made for the empty fireplace. He finished his journey in smoke. Then the four who had shot slipped their guns back into their holsters and resumed their cigarettes.

On another occasion I stopped for noon at the Circle I ranch. While waiting for dinner, I lay on my back in the bunkroom and counted three hundred and sixty-two bullet-holes in the ceiling. They came to be there because the festive cowboys used to while away the time while lying as I was lying, waiting for supper, in shooting the flies that crawled about the plaster.

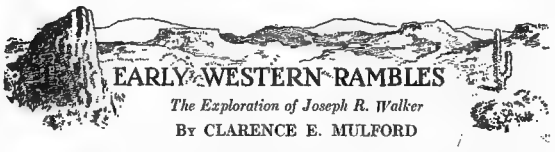
This beautiful familiarity with the pistol as a parlor toy accounts in great part for a cowboy's propensity to "shoot up the

town" and his indignation when arrested therefor.

The average cowboy is only a fair target-shot with the revolver. But he is chain lightning at getting his gun off in a hurry. There are exceptions to this, however, especially among the older men. Some can handle the Colt's .45 and its heavy recoil with almost uncanny accuracy. I have seen individuals who could, from their saddles, nip lizards darting across the road; and one who was able to perforate twice before it hit the ground a tomato-can tossed into the air. The cowboy is prejudiced against the double-action gun, for some reason or other. He manipulates his single-action weapon fast enough, however.

When it comes to a case of real hospitality of helpfulness, your cowboy is there every time. You are welcome to food and shelter without price, whether he is at home or not. Only it is etiquette to leave your name and thanks pinned somewhere about the place. Otherwise your intrusion may be considered in the light of a theft, and you may be pursued accordingly.

Contrary to general opinion, the cowboy is not a dangerous man to those not looking for trouble. There are occasional exceptions, of course, but they belong to the universal genus of bully, and can be found among any class. Attend to your own business, be cool and good-natured, and your skin is safe. Then, when it is really "up to you," be a man; you will never lack for friends.



EARLY WESTERN RAMBLES

The Exploration of Joseph R. Walker

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

TO JOSEPH R. WALKER, chief lieutenant of Capt. Bonneville, and his party of sixty men belongs the honor of being the first white men to cross the upper Nevada deserts on a course later followed by the California emigrants. At Bonneville's orders, Walker and his party left Salt Lake early in August, 1833, and struck out a little south of west across a most desolate and forbidding salt plain, reached the head waters of the Humboldt River and followed along this stream to its great sink, where they fought and slaughtered a large number of Digger Indians. From here they went on past the Sink of the Carson River, discovered and passed Walker's Lake and, turning more to the west, struck out for the mountains, passing to the northwest of Mono Lake and along J. S. Smith's route over the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the Merced River in California, which they followed to the San Joaquin. Crossing the latter they reached San Jose. Walker claimed that he had discovered Yosemite Valley on this march. They passed the winter in California, where some of them decided to settle; the others, about fifty in all, left the settlements in February, 1834, and, going up the San Joaquin Valley, rounded Tulare Lake, followed up Kern River to the Sierras, crossed them by the way of Owen Lake, followed Owen River until near the end of the eastern range of mountains, where they crossed and started northeasterly into the great desert of Nevada. After two days without water they abandoned this direction, swung back to the northwest and reached the lower end of the Sink of the Carson. From here they went on to the Sink of the Humboldt, fought and slaughtered more Digger Indians and, now on the trail they had made going out the year before, they headed for home along it until near the Utah line, where they swung off at an angle to reach the Snake River, which they followed to the rendezvous in Cache Valley, where they were to meet Bonneville. Most of his men had accompanied Walker on the long trip, and Bonneville had equipped it, hoping for great returns in beaver skins. The failure of the expedition so far as furs were concerned was a bitter disappointment to Bonneville, but its geographical discoveries were to be of great value a few years later. The total distance covered by this expedition in a little short of ten months—four of which were spent in the California settlements—was between eighteen hundred and two thousand miles.

INTO DEVIL'S DOMAIN

By EDWIN HUNT HOOVER

"A hell of a country—this Devil's Domain,"
So chanted the outlaw his doleful refrain.
"Before me a chasm; behind, a rock wall;
By night little water; by day none at all.
I'd build me a bonfire to cool off the air,
But pursuing posses would locate my lair.
I see the man-hunters by moon and by sun;
They'd make easy marks for the sheriff's own gun——"

NOT until his horse, Pardo—the gray—had jogged for an hour or two down the dry, sandy river bed did Clay Torklin realize that the friendly vegas of open country had given way to tiny tablelands which, in turn, joined onto lusty, grassed slopes that ascended abruptly and became merged into castellated rimrock of canyon walls.

Clay reined his pony to a halt and removed his big, dust-colored felt hat. He wiped perspiration from his brow after carefully taking off a buckskin glove. The whiteness of his hand showed quaintly against the background of weather-burnished features, for Clay, being a prideful and sagacious cowman, always protected his hands. They were vital to his profession, whereas his face, originally an Anglo-Saxon blond, performed no useful function beyond furnishing a setting for his eyes, nose and mouth, which had been taking care of themselves for some twenty-seven years. So long as that face was comfortable Clay paid it no heed; but when, as now, his beard, neglected by the razor for nearly a week, curled under and tried to grow into the cuticle he marked it for attention.

From the pocket of his scarred apron chaps he withdrew a vivid, bandanna handkerchief which had been stuffed there to keep dust and sand from clogging his six-shooter. He rubbed the sweatband of his hat with the handkerchief and gazed thoughtlessly about him.

"Huh! Someone was right about this Canyon Gigante," he ruminated. "You get into it somehow or other an' then keep on travelin' till you get out. No side canyons apparent to the naked eye; but there must be some somewhere. Folks over at Fairview said that Jerry Bolander lives in one of 'em. You, Pardo! Quit that pawin'!" he chided his mount. Then: "Dang me if he ain't after water! Dig deep, pony. I've heard that covered wagons made it through Gigante on water dug from the river bed."

He dismounted, taking a canteen from the saddle horn and drinking thirstily.

"Spring water," he grunted. "When'll I ever taste any more? Not till I find Bolander's ranch; an' that may be hard to do if wind has blown out cattle and wagon tracks."

He frowned slightly. Citizens in Fair-

view, across the divide to the east, had looked askance at him when he, traveling through in search of new range for his cattle, mentioned Canyon Gigante as his probable destination. He had heard that the high mesas flanking Gigante were sodded with grass "belly deep to a lean Texas longhorn."

"You'd prob'ly be lookin' for Jerry Bolander," surmised one old cattleman at the Fairview store. "He's about the most important cowman in Gigante an' has all kinds o' hell with sheep eatin' off his range. Maybe you're goin' in there to help him give 'em a battle."

Clay had not been looking for Bolander; but the name set memory tingling. A huge, kindly-faced man of that name was among his most vivid recollections of an orphaned boyhood in the little Texas town where trail herds touched on their way to the new Northern markets at Dodge City, Abilene and the Indian agencies. He remembered Bolander—and "Auntie" Disbrow who had mothered him until, at twelve, he had run away to become a cook's assistant, later horse wrangler and cowhand, and finally owner of a herd of "white faces" in drought-stricken southern New Mexico.

Auntie Disbrow, according to the confused impressions carried since childhood, had operated a sort of hotel. Clay had lived there for a while with his mother, a grim woman with tragic eyes. She hated Bolander for some reason entirely beyond the boy's comprehension, but welcomed the occasional visits of another man named Weagen whom Clay instinctively disliked. It was only after his mother's death—which must have occurred, Clay judged, when he was six or seven years old, that Bolander became a prominent factor in his life.

This genial man was forever producing candy from unexpected places, and he taught Clay to "set a pony." Mr. Bolander had a wife on his ranch, near Canutillo. She was a pretty woman, but the picture of her was, to Clay, like an exquisite cameo cut into the tablets of memory. She was not a living entity. Only the high-lights of boyhood remained to him, such as the time when he inquired about his father, of whom he could remember nothing, and Auntie Disbrow replied, "He died suddenly." She and Bolander, who had been present, exchanged meaning glances which puzzled Clay until he forgot the matter in the press of more important affairs of youth.

And he never forgot the sad day when Bolander came to Auntie Disbrow's hotel with a baby in his arms and announced that he was leaving Canutillo forever. He was going to take the infant somewhere and was not coming back. In this manner Bolander had passed out of Clay's life; and the reasons for it were varied, according to townsfolk he questioned on the subject.

"He sold his ranch," said one.

"He went to his sister's in Dallas," another informed him.

The day after Bolander's departure Clay encountered Weagen exchanging hot words with Auntie in the hotel parlor.

"He couldn't stand the gaff," Weagen bruskly answered Clay's perpetual query.

At this Auntie shooed Weagen from the room, flapping her apron at him angrily. But she calmed down in a moment and, taking Clay in her lap, gave the most satisfactory answer of all.

"Mr. Bolander's wife died and he had to take the baby where it would have good care," she explained.

This sufficed to allay curiosity, but years later on the trail Clay learned the truth: his father had been murdered and Bolander, accused of the crime, stood trial and was acquitted. Although he was freed of the charge, the residents of Canutillo, almost to a man and woman, believed Bolander guilty; and this sentiment had finally driven him from town.

This gossip, authentic as most cow camp tales which travel for thousands of miles by word of mouth and retain certain elements of truth in the retelling, shed light on Weagen's, "He couldn't stand the gaff"—of public opinion. Nevertheless Clay staunchly refused to believe in Bolander's guilt. The genial giant's entire nature gave the lie to this yarn of assassination.

These memories passed in review at the mention of "Jerry Bolander." Hence Clay had a double motive in exploring Canyon Gigante—for he had little doubt that Mr. Bolander of Canutillo, Texas, and Jerry Bolander of Great Canyon, New Mexico, were one and the same. Indeed, the chuck wagon stories of Jim Torklin's violent death carried Jerry Bolander's name as killer. Clay wanted to carry to his youthful benefactor a message of friendship and confidence.

He had often contemplated a visit to Canutillo just for the purpose of finding out about the tragedy by examining court records and interviewing old-timers, and he had often thought of writing to Auntie Disbrow. But the distance was great, and

Clay hesitated to address a letter to Auntie Disbrow, for he did not know whether she was Miss or Mrs., much less her initials.

PARDO hollowed out a sink in the sands and waited impatiently while water filled the depression. He nosed it greedily but drank sparingly, snorting his disgust. Alkaline! Clay verified the equine report of bad water by tasting it.

"This river juice ain't fit for humans or horses," he sympathized.

He mounted and traveled another series of sun-scorched miles. Then he saw the tracks of cattle and a pawed-out sink where the animals had drunk.

"We're comin' to civilization, Pardo, where we'll have good water to drink, maybe," he exulted. "Bolander's ranch won't be far from here."

But the pleasures of civilization were delayed. The dank, humid odor of hot wool permeated the still heat.

"Sheep!" spat Clay, the humorous lines of his lean face curled with disgust. "In the canyon! The report that they were claimin' the mesa range was bad enough. What a country!"

Within a mile he came to the sheep. Hundreds of woolies were grazing their way toward him, up-canyon. Clay circled the herd and accosted a pair of Mexican boys who were doing leisurely duty donkey-back, guiding stragglers into the line of march. Both referred him to the *maestro*, whom Clay found angrily spurring a jaded horse in the rear of his charges. He was a large man from whose frame corpulence had recently been sweated; not at all the type to be expected at the drag end of a bunch of sheep. He appeared flabby and discouraged. His face sagged along the jaw-lines.

"Goin' somewheres?" Clay asked. "Better stay all night. Rest your face an' feet."

Such jocularity was ill-timed, as conversation revealed, but there was no hint of ill-nature in the question and invitation. The flabby one, moreover, seemed too dejected to resent anything.

"I'm goin' out," he vouchsafed, stopping. "Large man on a big horse said that sheep would die in here—sure! Too hot for 'em, he told me. When I said my sheep could stand it he squinted his eyes an' remarked that I'd be s'prised how much hotter things would get, beginnin' tomorrow mornin' *early*. He misdoubted whether half my herd would survive till sundown. So I'm on my way, but I've sent word to the sheriff that I've been intimidated."

He sighed.

"It *is* cooler outside the canyon," Clay ventured. "I should think you'd keep driftin' north, down-canyon, toward the San Juan River, an' land up in Colorado after a while."

"Mr. Bolander recommended this direction," the sheepman sighed again. "I came this way."

"Bolander?" Clay's quick ears caught at the name.

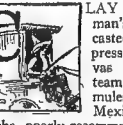
"He's the cattleman I talked with. He lives down there," waving a hand vaguely in a northeasterly direction. "Came out of a side canyon with cottonwoods. Went back into it, I guess. Well, good luck to you."

He started his jaded horse.

"I dug a tank back yonder," he stopped to call over a shoulder. "Don't s'pose it'll do you any good since sheep've been in it." And, as an afterthought: "You'll meet my wagon. Eat hearty if you want."

Clay grinned.

"Get along, pony," he urged Pardo. "We stay at a white man's ranch this night—if we don't smell too strong of sheep. Mr. Bolander must have qualities that I never suspected as a kid, if he can put a sheepman to flight by just talkin' to him."



CLAY passed the sheepman's wagon as forecasted, an ancient express wagon with a canvas top, drawn by a team of wiry Spanish mules and driven by a Mexican *muchacho*; also the poorly-recommended tank. Soon thereafter he saw a clump of cottonwoods which marked a break in the eastern wall of Gigante. The trail of a lone horse led to this cleft and Clay followed it across the sands, knowing no better way to find the domicile of Mr. Bolander.

Thus Clay Torklin passed from the giant chasm into canyon Chico—so named, not because it is small, but because of the brush that grows there among the rocks, the succulent-leaved *chico* bush which is used to fatten and condition cattle in the spring. Occasional piñon trees and scrubby cedars graced the hillsides as Clay progressed along the trail, which became better defined with the tracks of many horses and cattle.

The trail banked sharply up from the dry creek and, rounding a bend, Clay found himself on a minor plateau—Bolander Plateau, he afterward learned it was called. In front of him, not fifty yards away, was a pole corral with one saddled horse in it; behind this, a sturdily built rock house with smoke pouring from the chimney.

Clay rode to the door "helloing" the house vigorously, for he knew that danger often attended a silent approach—especially at a time when men are at odds over range and are inclined to challenge all comers. He kept to his saddle, sensing that he was under surveillance. This suspicion was verified when a feminine voice, steady despite a vibrant quality which bespoke agitation, rang out from behind a half-opened window.

"Sorry to be discourteous, but you'll have to state your business before I can ask you to get down. You're from Weagen, no doubt."

"Oh, gosh, no!" Clay answered. "I'm from 'way south of Albuquerque."

Then, startled by the familiarity of a name that had recently been drawn from Memory's archives, he was about to amend his reply; but the voice, laughing now, bade him dismount. Clay obeyed, his mind a flurry of question marks and exclamation points.

In the doorway stood the smiling figure of a girl, not consciously posed but singularly attractive with the weight of her supple body resting on one trimly-booted foot. Clay, with the observant eye of the cattleman which is trained to see and never forget, noted that she wore overalls, stuffed into the boot tops, and that the garment clung to her familiarly as if with long usage in the saddle.

She was a capable-looking young person, though unmistakably feminine despite the mannishness of her attire—the trousered legs and blue "hickory" shirt—with slightly tip-tilted nose, a scattering of freckles, and reddish-brown hair that was bound round her head in long braids.

"You certainly cast reflections on our sheriff by referring to him as a town," she continued to smile. "But may I inquire your business here?" she went on more seriously. "I know that's not very hospitable, but conditions are such that we like to know about strangers before inviting them in."

Clay concentrated his faculties and instinctively doffed his hat.

"I'm Clay Torklin," he explained. "My cattle, a hundred an' fifty miles or so south o' here, will be starvin' for grass within the next couple months; an' I was lookin' for a new range, if I can move in someplace where feed is good an' neighbors agreeable. I come originally from Canutillo, Texas," Clay cataloged himself as thoroughly as possible, "an' heard that Jerry Bolander lives in these parts; so I thought I'd drop in—" He broke off when he saw the girl's expression of astonished welcome effaced by a shadow. "I didn't know Mr. Bolander had a daughter—though I might 'a'—" he finished lamely.

"He has." The young woman put him at ease on this point. "I'm she. Bernice Bolander. Come in, Mr. Torklin. Dad will be glad to see a fellow *Tejano*." Her features lighted with friendliness. "I don't know much about Canutillo except that I was born near there, but dad has told me so much about your that I almost called you Clay. He has wondered a thousand times what became of you."

She extended a small, firm hand with hesitant cordiality and once more Clay observed the shadow of doubt in her eyes. Perhaps, he meditated, she was sizing up the son of Jim Torklin to determine his attitude toward her father. But he decided against this. She had probably been guarded against this chapter in Jerry Bolander's life as he had been while in Canutillo.

"And I've wondered no less about him," Clay replied, still at a loss to understand the conflict of friendliness and reserve in her manner, but grasping the proffered hand nevertheless.

He followed her into the cool interior of the house and seated himself awkwardly one one of the home-make, pine chairs while Bernice busied herself with supper preparations. She relieved him of the necessity for making conversation, of which he was, just then, incapable, by a running fire of amiable commonplaces, interspersed with exclamations of, "How surprised dad will be when he finds you here," and, "I've always felt, somehow, that I'd meet you somewhere, sometime."

Clay tried to associate this vigorous bloom of womanhood with the baby he had once seen in Jerry Bolander's arms and the effort, queerly, embarrassed him.

The girl caught his speculative gaze and flushed.

"Have we ever met before?" she inquired, pausing with her hands in the bread dough.

"Once," Clay responded, grinning sheep-

ishly. "There wasn't so much of you then, an' it takes longer to look you over now." He related the occasion of their meeting. "That would be right at nineteen years ago, an' you was only a month, or less, old. I'm glad to find out, after so long a time that you was—are—a girl."

"I'm not dressed any more girlishly at present," she parried.

"But I'd know y'u for what y'u are a mile away," Clay blurted.

"That," she assured him, putting a pan of biscuits in the oven, "will take the edge off some of dad's joking. He tells me that I dress, act, and work so much like a man that I'll soon be one—not that it makes much difference, here."

Clay was about to interrupt, but Bernice rose with a little cry of dismay and took counsel of an alarm clock on the table.

"Dad ought to be here," she exclaimed. "He should have been home before this time, unless something has happened. It's nearly seven o'clock." But she quickly brought her emotions under control and was immediately solicitous for her guest. "Of course you're hungry. We'll not wait for him any longer."

"I'll go water my pony," Clay suggested, "an' turn him loose to graze, if y'u don't mind."

The note of anxiety in her voice disturbed him; still he knew the many things that might delay a cowman: tailing up the poor ones, branding a slick-ear, doctoring an ailing calf. It was possible, of course, that the Gigante sheepman's complaint of intimidation might have brought about an arrest; but this seemed unlikely because an officer would naturally serve his papers at the home ranch. If there was another cause for worry, the girl had not revealed it; and Clay was not the sort to force a confidence.

"Go ahead," Bernice invited. "There's no horse pasture. I keep a wrangling animal up, though, and I'll find your mount in the morning."

"Pardo won't leave," Clay replied as he jammed on his hat and strode outside. "He's used to hangin' around camp."

IT WAS sundown and after when Clay came back to the house. He had watered Pardo and curried his sweaty back with a rough bit of wood; he had also done some little prospecting around afoot to kill time and give himself an opportunity to speculate how Jerry Bolander would greet him? The older man had sought seclusion for a purpose. He might suspect his visitor's motives in invading it and believe that Clay, after hearing the rumors in connection with his father's death, had come to avenge the assassination. An unpleasant scene might be enacted in the girl's presence before explanations could set Bolander aright.

Viewing the prospective encounter from his own angle, Clay pondered deeply. What if he had misjudged Bolander's nature? It might be that the big cattleman had tried to salve his conscience by being kind to the child he had orphaned. And there must be iron in Bolander's make-up; else the Gigante sheepman would not have fled with his wagon, herders, and flock at the cattleman's bidding. Patently, no display of tenderness such as the juvenile Clay had seen in Bolander would cause the flabby *maestra* to leave so precipitately. Here was another side of his benefactor's character.

And what of Weagen? Bernice had intimated that this former Canutilloan was sheriff. She had thought he, Clay, was a deputy from Weagen's office. What was the connection? The sheepman's complaint? Was Weagen in sympathy with the range despoilers? Would he use his office to discomfort Bolander? Evidently. The girl had been on guard against such a possibility.

These thoughts and conjectures harrassed Clay. A half hour had gone by and still his host did not put in an appearance. Bernice, having waited vainly for her guest to return voluntarily, called him.

"Dad's late," she greeted him, "but sit down and eat."

She was a gracious hostess; but Clay, opposite her at the table, saw that she was uneasy.

"You mentioned Weagen a while back," he ventured over a liberal helping of jerkie and gravy. "Seems to me I remember him in Canutillo."

"He worked for dad there a good many years ago," she told him, her eyes searching him frankly. "When dad came here, Weagen came too. That's what I gather from odds and ends of information I pick up occasionally. I was 'farmed out' with dad's sister and her husband in Dallas when I was a baby, so I'm not acquainted with Canutillo at first hand. Dad often talks about Auntie Disbrow——"

"Oh, I remember a lot about her," Clay put in eagerly. He talked at length about

the motherly little woman, unwittingly, establishing credentials that put him into the girl's confidence as no other means could have done.

"But why," he inquired at the conclusion of his discourse about Auntie, "did you look that way when I mentioned my name? You must 'a' heard somethin' unpleasant about me or my family, I judge. Your dad is, along with Auntie Disbrow, among the finest memories I have of Canutillo."

The barriers of reticence had been swept away and Bernice, lighting a kerosene lamp was obviously alarmed over her father's continued absence. She was glad, in fact, to have someone in whom she could confide. Clay, happy that he had found his way into her good graces, was an ardent listener.

"It was because dad always cuts Weagen short when he mentions the name 'Torklin'," Bernice replied. "Half a dozen times I've gotten the impression that Weagen wanted to say something in my hearing about this Torklin. It was almost a threat to dad, or so it seemed. Consequently I've wondered, particularly since dad talked to me so freely and affectionately about you in private, though he's never spoken about your father and mother, only said you were an orphan and that he knew your parents.

"You see," she leaned her elbows on the table and cupped her chin in her palms, "Weagen and dad were working this ranch in partnership when I came home two years ago after finishing high school in Dallas; and Weagen—well, things weren't any too pleasant when I refused to marry him. So dad steered him into politics; helped put him over as sheriff; bought out his interest in the place," she summarized briefly.

"Dad thought that Weagen having headquarters up on the San Juan at Hispana, thirty miles from here, would simplify things; but it hasn't—much. Although it keeps him away from the ranch, Weagen hasn't raised a hand to help us or see that we get a fair deal from the sheepmen who are throwing in herds that graze the mesas bare. If it wasn't for the *chico* in this canyon, cattle would die of hunger in the spring."

The girl, unable to repress her nervousness, stood up, peered from a window into the darkness, listened intently and finally sat down in a rocker, high strung, and tense.

"Weagen became so popular in office that he was called upon to settle boundary disputes, and he's given satisfaction to all the cattlemen between here and Hispana. That drives sheep to this end of the range and dad has had to fight it out single-handed——"

"Don't ownership of water control the range?" Clay demanded. "Hasn't Mr. Bolander got title to the land where his waters are?"

"We can't get title. All this is government land, but it hasn't been surveyed and can't be bought or homesteaded. A 'squatter's right' is the only title available. The waters father developed for his cattle are overrun with sheep. He chases them off. The owners complain to Weagen; Weagen refuses to arbitrate unless——"

"Unless you marry him," Clay supplemented, drawing together the threads of unsuccessful courtship and range conditions.

He packed his pipe with tobacco deliberately but waited with match poised until a comradely nod from Bernice gave him permission to light the venerable briar.

"Therefore," she continued, "while dad is ordering out a sheepman in Gigante, Frisbee, the biggest wool grower in this section, and his crowd are ruining the mesa range. Just to-day——"

"Yes," Clay interjected with a grin. "I saw the gent leaving. He was all dejected an' nonplussed."

"He pretended to be!" Bernice stormed. "It was all a part of a scheme. That man, Harrold, was just a decoy. He diverted dad's attention in Gigante so that Frisbee would have time to locate a flock of sheep at Tin Can Spring. He's done it before. Dad guessed their plan and went out on the mesa to look after things as soon as he got back from the big canyon.

"That's why I'm so worried. I'm afraid that he'll have to kill Frisbee or one of the others, or else be shot, himself."

She spoke hurriedly and glanced at the alarm clock for the hundredth time.

"It's—it's ten o'clock now, and he should have been here hours ago. He had been gone so long when you came that I thought you were a deputy from Weagen's office sent as a result of Harrold's complaint. They always complain," she burst out, bitterly, "of threats of violence when they trespass on our range and dad puts them off, but they won't spend a cent to develop one of their own."

Clay felt his own gorge rising. He knew the kind of sheepman Frisbee represented, the kind who will preempt the industry of

his neighbor and contribute nothing; who will denude a range and do nothing to compensate; who will skulk, raid, apologize, and humiliate himself, but will not fight or come into the open like a man and negotiate for territory. He had dealt with that type and had had trouble. He had also dealt with the other class, upstanding business men who were wool growers and willing to stand their share of range maintenance. Difficulties with them had been easily smoothed out.

"What—what shall we do?" the girl almost whispered. "Dad has been gone so long; I'm afraid!"

It was not the self-reliant maid of the late afternoon who spoke. Instead, she had become a suppliant. She was frightened and begging with her eyes for the counsel of a trusted friend. Clay thrilled when he realized how intimate had become their relationship in so short a time; for already he had begun to build dreams around the girl in overalls and blue hickory shirt. There was a lure about her which Clay tried to explain away by the unconventional situation—just the two of them there, alone; the light of a full moon filtering through the open windows; her trouble and anxiety.

He wanted to put a sympathetic arm around her shoulders, but he knew that such an act would at once destroy that comaraderie into which they had drifted.

"I'll make a *pasear* out on the flats," he said briskly, rising, "an' see if I can locate your dad. Likely he's made camp at some water to guard against sheep comin' back durin' the night. He might kill a beef or somethin' if he gets hungry."

"Of course," Bernice bravely tried to fall into his optimistic mood, "he's all right. I'm just over-apprehensive. Here," she ran to a shelf and returned with pencil and paper. "I'll draw a diagram of the country so you'll be able to find your way around. Strangers can get lost easily."

She began drafting with Clay leaning over her shoulder.

"This is the ranch, and this," she drew a crooked line, "is the trail to the mesa. The left hand one, going north, leads to Tin Can Spring where dad was headed. You'll find him there, I'm sure. But be careful not to get into the broken country beyond there. Canyons drop off into sheer space right in the midst of sodded mesa and it becomes a maze of rocks, trees, and hills. Fine place for outlaws and wild cattle, but the ordinary man would lose his own soul in Devil's Domain, as it is called."

She indicated the terrain by a deft series of scrolls and curves.

"A tolerably complete map," Clay approved, taking the paper, "but I probably won't need it. I'll fall in on Mr. Bolander's tracks an' overtake him directly.

"If y'u'll let me throw my saddle on your pony, I'll breeze along. You stay here so that, in case your dad should come amblin' in, he won't start out huntin' for you."

CLAY left the corral with a mental picture of Bernice that stayed with him always — standing there in the moonlight, slim, boyish, wistful, but waving good-by with the high heart of courage.

"It's not right, me ridin' away like this an' leavin' her there alone," he told himself. "Nothin' the matter with the old man, but," he soliloquized, "it wouldn't be quite right for me to stay all night there with no one else around, either. I wonder if she thought of that, too. I'll find Mr. Bolander an' camp with him till mornin'."

Shadows from piñon trees overcast the trail in most places, but Clay picked out the fresh imprints of a shod horse without difficulty. Nothing had passed over the bridle path since Bolander traveled it. He followed these tracks through the rimrock and, at a divergence of trails, still pursued them on the left-hand branch toward Tin Can Spring.

Clay sniffed the sage-scented air greedily. The night was almost as bright as day and a breeze had sprung up. His thoughts were more of the girl he had left at the canyon ranch than of his quest for Bolander. Then the trail dipped between a pair of rolling hills, and tragedy reared its ugly head!

A riderless horse, grazing down the draw on the opposite side of a tiny, shimmering basin of water, snorted and dashed away as fast as trailing reins would permit. Clay, looking for the cause of this sudden terror—for his own approach, even if seen by the animal, would have occasioned nothing more than a neigh of welcome—saw the slinking form of a coyote stealing across an open space toward a silent bulk on the near side of the pond.

Clay's hair stood on end. Quickly he jerked his rifle from its scabbard between stirrup leathers and sent a bullet which, despite the plunging of his mount, whizzed

past the prairie scavenger's nose. The coyote fled and Clay, dismounting, made his way afoot to the body.

One glance and he knew that life was extinct, had been for hours. The face, upturned, bore an expression of surprised benignity, as though the end had caught him unawares, leaving the features with something of their natural kindliness. Clay knew that face; Jerry Bolander has passed on, gravely genial as Clay remembered him in Canutillo days. A jagged wound showed where a leaden missile entered the throat, but Clay did not turn the body over to view the gaping hole and shattered cartilage that must appear when the bullet passed through.

Instead, he investigated the pistol that lay half a yard from the dead, outstretched hand. One shot had been fired. Then Clay retraced his steps to his horse.

He dreaded the ordeal of breaking the terrible news to Bernice. He felt a keen sense of personal loss in the passing of this man who was one of the two only friends he had known as a child; he wished now that he had come a little sooner, in time to tell Jerry Bolander that the son of Jim Torklin believed him innocent of the crime for which he was tried and acquitted.

Though he had been raised in a hard school where guns, fists, and blood had played their part, this tragedy fairly sickened him and he delayed the next distasteful step—of lifting the body into a saddle and taking it home—by yielding to the plainsman's instinct to "cut sign." There was the barest chance that he might discover some evidence which would identify the killer.

He reconstructed the scene as nearly as possible. Bolander had been riding toward the spring. Someone had opened fire from the adjacent hillside. Bolander had naturally drawn his gun and was probably pulling the trigger when the fatal shot reached him. The cattleman's features, in the repose of death, were not those of a man who had recently engaged in a quarrel. Habitual good nature marked them. A surprise attack, then, had been executed. What was it Bernice had said—Harrold, the flabby sheepman, was probably being used as decoy while Frisbee drove his flocks to Tin Can Spring?

There was eloquent sign that sheep had been at the spring a short time before. Frisbee, perhaps, had been present when Bolander rode up. The sheepman had opened fire, believing that a crisis had arrived and that he could count on Sheriff Weagen's protection.

Clay, quartering the hill on his borrowed mount, wondered if Weagen, suitor of Bernice, would dare try to protect the slayer of her father. The official had evidently been straddling the diplomatic fence, to the advantage of the Frisbee crowd; but he had been neutral, to all intents and purposes, in the range controversy. Would the sheriff "play politics?" Or would he discharge the duties of his office honestly in the interests of justice, and to win favor with Bernice?

Fresh tracks appeared on the brow of the hill. Stampeding equine hooves had torn up gravel and sod. The animal had undoubtedly been frightened when firing commenced. Nearby, and more important, were boot tracks! Clay slid to earth and studied them closely. Bootheels indented the soft soil between clumps of bunch grass for a time; then in the screen of a greasewood hedge the tracks changed in character—to the toe and knee imprint of a kneeling rifleman.

A murderer had been waiting for Jerry Bolander! The sheepmen, so Clay guessed, anticipating that the cattleman would fathom their ruse of sending Harrold into Giganta and that he would be out on the mesa to repel other marauders, had laid this trap for him.

There was a spent thirty-thirty shell close at hand. The bushwhacker, Clay surmised, had ejected it when he saw that his first shot had missed and forgot it in the excitement of making his kill on the second attempt and in his subsequent haste to catch his horse. It was hardly a clue, for almost everybody carried a rifle of that caliber—himself among the rest.

Another object, gleaming metallicaly in the moonlight caught Clay's eye. Its milled edges and embossed surface gave it the appearance of a twenty-dollar gold-piece, but close examination revealed it to be a medallion containing the figure of a cowboy riding a bucking horse. The disc was slotted near the top. The milled edge above this slot was leaded and flattened; also a bit of leather was fused into this section of metal and a broken fragment of strap still adhered to it.

This discovery threw Clay into a fever of excitement, but he did not jump at conclusions. He knelt in the slayer's tracks, rifle in hand, and took careful aim at the point where Bolander had fallen, sighting to the approximate height of a man on horseback. In this position, with his torso

half turned so as to accommodate his left elbow to a rest on his left knee cap he studied the angle of his body in its relation to the probable course of a bullet fired by Bolander from the depression below.

"Great Jehosephat!" he exclaimed. "Jerry Bolander shot off some ornament from his murderer's vest—likely a watch fob! It must be. Otherwise why would the strap be attached? If he aimed at the flash from the rifle, or the puff of smoke, and shot slightly low, the bullet would pass between the marksman's right elbow an' body, or plough through or graze one or the other. In this case it missed the ribs by an inch an' took a watch fob. This," he jubilated, "will simplify things a whole lot if—" Then he sobered and considered. "I wish I knew if Weagen can be trusted? I never did like that man when I was a kid and I like him less now." His eyes were thoughtful. "And they do say that a kid's instincts are right."

SUNRISE crept into Canyon Chico on the heels of Clay Torklin, whose horse, walking slowly, led another with its funereal burden.

Clay's face was drawn but his shoulders were squared. A great wave of sympathy swept over him when he came in sight of the rock house and Bernice, who had heard the clack of horses' hooves, rushed to the door. She was femininely attired this time in a crisp gingham house dress. Her hair, coiffed sedately, haloed her as the soft filaments caught the sun's rays.

Bernice checked a cry of welcome and stood, mutely staring, not at Clay but at the led horse. She wilted and might have fallen if Clay had not reached her in time with a supporting hand.

"There now, girl," he tried to comfort her. "Go ahead an' cry. Get it out o' your system."

"No," she drew away from him and there was a dry catch in her voice. "I'll get a bed ready. You bring him in." Her demoralized faculties rallied under the whip of inborn pluck.

Not until Clay had deposited Jerry Bolander in his bunk did Bernice speak again.

"Who did this—thing?" she asked.

She was so white that it seemed he could count every freckle without effort. He thought she would faint and guided her into the kitchen where he offered her a dipperfull of water. Bernice refused it. Nor would she sit down. She stood, man fashion, balancing her weight evenly on the high heels and soles of her boots.

"Who did it?" she repeated. Her eyes, a deep violet now, still bore the stunned expression.

"I don't know," Clay told her, adding details as to how he had found her father; the tracks he had seen and what they portended. "Now," he produced the medallion, "do you know who this belongs to?"

Bernice's interest quickened but, after a moment, died.

"I never saw it before."

Clay was disheartened. He knew of no one else that he could trust with this clue.

"Then don't tell anyone you've seen it," he advised. "The owner would be hard to catch if he knew we had him grabbed with evidence like this. Someone might tip him off to leave the country."

"You're right," she agreed with the incisiveness of her first challenge to him when he had ridden up to the house.

"An' now, how about notifyin' the sheriff an' coroner?" Clay turned his attention to the immediate demands of the emergency. "Will I have to go to town—Hispana?"

"Clarke Delevan has a ranch ten miles down Gigante," Bernice told him. Remembering her duties as hostess, she ran to the stove where a pot of coffee had been boiling for the past fifteen minutes. "If you'll tell Clarke," she poured a cup of the steaming, black liquid and handed it to Clay, "and—and—come back here to help me—I'll be grateful."

Scalding coffee slopped over the rim of the cup onto Clay's trembling hand. He gulped the lye-like drink. She was so pitiful to look at, and withal so staunch and so game.

"I'll wrangle Pardo an' be on my way," he said, jingling from the kitchen.

CLAY, in dispatching Delevan, a grizzled, bachelor veteran of cattle country, for the officials, had one admonition.

"Rather y'u wouldn't mention my name to Weagen," he suggested, while waiting in the corral for Delevan to saddle. "Just say that I'm a pilgrim who happened by the Bolander ranch."

Delevan peered down his nose. He had taken an instantaneous liking to the energetic, clean-cut young stranger.

"Weagen will hang someone—*someone*—sure as hell, for this murder," he warned. "Jerry withdrew his support, formal, from the sheriff last week, though I don't s'pose his daughter knows that her pa has broke with his one-time *compadre*. A clearin' up o' this killin' will be his one chance to win back the votes that Bolander took away from him. Bolander controled more ballots than any other one man in the country. It was his influence that put Weagen in office, an' it could take him out just as easy. So you can gamble a stack o' blues that the sheriff will cast his loop in such a way as to make the most fav'rable showin'.

"If he prognosticates around a heap industrious an' conducts his investigation so as to satisfy Jerry's friends, he'll snare the lost votes an' lead 'em back into the pen. As for me," Delevan gave the last tug at the latigo and regarded Clay meaningly, "I'm slightly nervous about my own alibies. Nothin' but the ranch cat to prove where I was last night."

Clay laughed, tired as he was.

"I'll look to my fences," he promised. "But I can't run out on Miss Bernice at a time like this."

"Knowin' Bernice, I don't blame y'u for feelin' that way." Delevan swung to his horse's back. "But watch yore step! Weagen is thorough in his work; election time is comin' along an' he'd rather convict someone outside the county who wouldn't cost him any votes than someone with political friends hereabouts."

"Weagen knows me," Clay reassured the disturbed Mr. Delevan. "And Miss Bolander, I'm positive, will give me whatever more credentials I need. So long."

Clay was spurring in the direction of Canyon Chico. Now he wished that he had taken Delevan into his confidence and showed him the gold medallion. The Gigante cowman inspired trust and would probably know, or be able to find out, to whom the ornament belonged. Perhaps, thought Clay, Delevan would accompany officials to the Bolander ranch and there would be opportunity for a conference.

Delevan, however, was not among those present when Weagen and the coroner from Hispana arrived at Bolander Plateau some hours later in a buckboard. Clay, somewhat disappointed, followed Bernice from the house and was introduced to the sheriff.

"You two should know each other," the girl said in presenting them.

Clay enjoyed the look of stupefaction that overspread Weagen's ruddy, well-fleshed face as the official stood there, staring at him as if he were seeing the ghost of a forgotten past.

"Well, of all unexpected things," the sheriff, quickly rallying from his astonishment, gripped Clay's hand with effusive cordiality. "L'il Clay Torklin—growed up an' much of a man!" He shed official dignity like a cloak and was almost fervent in his greeting. "Why, last I saw of you, you wasn't knee high to a pint o' cider! This is a mighty sad occasion for a reunion—mighty sad."

Weagen shook his head and his melancholy eyes, like rounded windows under the bristling brows, included Bernice in their look of sympathetic grief.

This was not the kind of man Clay had expected Weagen to be. The bluff friendliness was disarming. There was a real sincerity to it. Clay remembered Weagen as a swaggering, querulous sort of person and decided that time, politics, and the shock of his former partner's untimely death had conspired to mellow him.

"Well, let's get to work," Weagen prompted. "Delevan tells me you found the body, Clay. Lead us to the place."

Clay mounted Pardo and guided sheriff and coroner to Tin Can Spring; showed them the spot where Bolander's corpse had lain, and the boot tracks. Weagen, himself, found and exclaimed over the kneeling imprints of the slayer.

"Find anythin' that might help?" he asked noncommittally, smoothing his tapered, tawny mustache.

"This thirty-thirty shell." Clay had been studying the man intently.

Weagen, after a glance, slipped this bit of evidence into his chaps pocket. "Not much to go on unless the firin' pin left a distinctive mark. I'll examine it under the microscope later. Anythin' else?"

"What else would you expect me to find?" Clay inquired evenly.

"Nothin' in particular," Weagen answered in a tone of surprise. "I just wanted to know what we have by way o' evidence an' clues."

After this consultation the party went back to the Bolander ranch, where Bernice joined them at the corral. Here Weagen's manner changed.

"Son," he addressed Clay with plump and patronizing dignity, "mind if I look at your rifle?"

"Help yourself," Clay, slightly mystified, acquiesced readily.

"H-m-m-m," the sheriff, taking the fire-arm from Pardo's saddle, snapped down the lever and an empty shell flew out of the barrel. "How come?"

"Shot a coyote away from Mr. Bolander's body," Clay made haste to explain.

Bernice, wide-eyed, watched these proceedings intently.

"I think, son," Weagen's eyes, pale and impersonal now, fastened to the younger man, "that you'd best come along with me—to town. You've been the least bit too eager in showin' me the lay an' explainin' things. Those tracks out yonder show that you approached Tin Can Spring, circled the hill, an' went in behind that clump o' greasewood——"

IT CAME to Clay with the swiftness of light that he had built a trap for himself even more ingeniously than Bolander's murderers had contrived one for their victim. His boot tracks and those of the killer differed in no essential, nor did the sign left by their horses. All might have been made by the same man and mount. Yet Clay Torklin smiled. It was a frozen smile, cold as an iceberg. Delevan's warning—ominous now—came to him: "Rather convict someone outside the county who wouldn't cost him any votes."

"You'd have done better to leave the body as y'u found it," Weagen gave belated advice.

"An' leave Jerry Bolander to be eaten by coyotes?" Clay snapped at him.

"Better safe than sorry." The sheriff turned to the coroner, keeping his gun hand on the butt of his six-shooter, which protruded from a belt holster. "Look him over for pocket weapons. Then we'll ride along."

"Hold on!" Clay cut in. His wits, paralyzed for the moment, raced to checkmate the sheriff. He put out a detaining hand to the coroner, a wiry little man of political aspect. "Why, Jerry Bolander an' his friendship are the best recollections I have as a kid. I——" He blinked his eyes as though repressing tears. He sniffled, then shamelessly produced his handkerchief from his chaps pocket. Weagen, watching narrowly for a trick, gripped his gun handle convulsively, then relaxed. Clay blew his nose violently while the officials and Bernice looked on in astonishment at the weakness thus displayed.

"It—it just ain't in reason that I'd have any cause to kill Jerry Bolander," he continued in broken tones. "If a sheepman had been shot, there'd be some cause to suspect me, but Mr. Bolander an' I were both cattlemen. What motive could I 'a' had?"

"You know well enough that Jerry Bolander killed your own father; an' that your mother brought you up with the idea of avengin' the crime."

Clay had expected some such reply as this. It lent substance to the memory that his mother had hated Bolander; that she was friendly with Weagen; that Bolander would not discuss Torklin when both Bernice and Weagen were present. To the girl it came totally unexpectedly. She had learned in one short sentence a rumor from which she had been guarded all her life. The import of it rocked her, as Clay could see, and he did the only thing he could to help her.

"Then why wasn't Mr. Bolander hung or put in prison?" he flung back logically.

"He was acquitted on an alibi furnished by Auntie Disbrow," Weagen disposed of this angle with some apparent satisfaction, cannily noting the effect on Bernice. "She was the only witness, outside o' myself. She claimed that he spent the night when Jim Torklin was killed at her hotel. I was workin' for Jerry at the time so, o' course, I perjured myself by backin' her with hearsay evidence—which was permitted in courts in those days. Auntie is dead now."

The sheriff took from his hip pocket a wallet from which he extracted a newspaper clipping headed: "Historic Character Dying; With Auntie Disbrow Will Pass An Epoch Of The Old West." This he showed, but did not hand, to Clay.

"Dated last week," Weagen commented, replacing it in his wallet.

"Then there'd be nobody to testify that all this 's a lie," Clay guessed shrewdly.

"I can testify that it's the truth," Weagen stated deliberately. "As a matter o' simple justice I'll have to."

"Then I reckon all's said that is necessary, except—" the handkerchief that was being put back in his pocket fluttered to the ground and in Clay's fingers appeared the pistol so safely guarded against sand and dust—"that you've got to take me before you can railroad me. I'm not goin' to be a political set-up for you to knock down." He spoke mildly, but there was

deadly menace in both eyes and voice. "Coroner, turn around while I frisk you. That's good; no guns. Now, while I hold Mr. Weagen steady with this steel at his shoulder blades, just uncouple his cartridge belt an' let it fall. While you're at it, put my thirty-thirty in its scabbard. I have plenty ammunition for it in the saddle pockets, but I may need the extra six-shooter an' equipment."

The tension being eased slightly, Clay mounted Pardo leisurely, after buckling the sheriff's ammunition belt around his waist so that the pendant gun dangled at his left hip.

"Now you can pursue your official duties without molestation—or a defendant," he told Weagen.

Then his eyes sought Bernice's hungrily. "You don't think I—did it—do you?"

The question so abruptly shot at her was a momentous one. The death of her loved parent, the revelation of his supposed infamy, the accusation of her trusted friend, his outlaw status—all had come in such startling succession that she had reason to hesitate. Her emotions, instincts and reason were in turmoil and conflict. But she felt that she must be honest.

"No! No! You didn't!" she cried, true to herself and guided only by her heart.

She was standing at a distance of several yards from him, but Pardo, quickened by the prick of spur rowels, closed the gap in a lunge. Clay, exulting in his vindication from Bernice's lips, leaned over and took her in the crook of his left arm, drawing her up, resisting at first but helping in the ascent when her foot met Clay's in the stirrup, till her face was on a level with his.

In the twinkling of an eye, almost, he had become an outlaw and had found love and confidence in the touch of her lips. Yet, even in that intoxicating instant when her warm, pliant body was crushed against him, the vigilant weapon in his right hand spoke to the sheriff who, raging and believing himself unguarded, dashed for the house.

Weagen planted himself like a cutting pony in the herd as a bullet buried itself directly in his path.

"Bernice, I can't take y'u with me," Clay spoke to the girl, unperturbed. "Your dad needs you. Anyhow, I'm going now where a man would lose his own soul, but I'll be back."

"But what about—my dad killing yours?" she sobbed. "That will hang over us like a pall of death—always."

"That happened in another generation, girl." Clay kissed her again. "An' we're not sure about it yet."

He let her slip to the ground, and he was gone in a shower of dust and pebbles.

THE hurriedly-sketched map that Bernice had given him for another purpose served Clay Torklin well in his flight. It directed him to Devil's Domain, an uninhabited series of chasms tapering off into grama-grassed hills affording innumerable hiding-places for himself and good feed for Pardo.

The matter of thirst became serious before Clay, following the trail of a wild bull and his harem of two cows, found a seep where water dripped out of the face of solid rock.

Then, day after day, in a lofty cave he watched posses scouting about, Weagen at times directing them. Several times Clay had to pinch Pardo's nostrils to keep him from neighing to the man-hunters' horses, for Clay had found a route across bald stretches of granite to lead his pony to his stronghold during the sunlight hours. When the pursuers found the tracks where Pardo had grazed, they became much excited but decided, after fruitless attempts at trailing, that some cowman had been in there after stray cattle.

Clay judged rightly that these evidences of pursuit meant that an inquest had resulted in the issuance of a warrant for his arrest on a charge of murder. He wondered what Bernice had told the coroner's jury.

As hunger began to gnaw at his vitals—an occasional rabbit was all that he dared kill for food—mental depression followed. Despite the exhilarating memory of Bernice's kisses and her expressed trust in him, he commenced to magnify the barrier that stood in the way of their happiness, began to doubt her loyalty. He had told her, "I'm going where a man would lose his own soul," so that she would know where he would be hiding. Perhaps she had passed this information on to the sheriff's office!

Clay shook himself angrily when these thoughts passed through his mind. He felt certain that a square meal would put him in a saner frame of mind. He must occupy himself with plans for getting out of the country and preparing his defense. Somehow he must find the owner of the

gold medallion. If he could get back into lower New Mexico and send one of his friends to investigate quietly with Clarke Delevan, that would turn the trick!

Even this determined effort to guide his thoughts into more normal and happier channels was unavailing. Still, he resolutely fought off the suspicious mood and querulously blamed the environment.

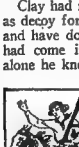
"A hell of a country this Devil's Domain," he told himself. He repeated it and recognized a metrical lilt. "Po-et an' didn't know-it," he chanted and then focused his energies on the composition of a companion line that would rhyme.

It was laborious work—and well that it was so; it occupied his brain to the exclusion of all else. It grew at the rate of a line a day and served to mark the passage of time. He chanted himself to sleep with it—"So chanted the outlaw his doleful refrain; before me a chasm; behind a rock wall—I see the man-hunters by moon and by sun; they'd make easy marks for the sheriff's own gun——"

The reason the poem is not more extended lies in the fact that, on the day of its completion to this stage, there was no hue and cry of posses. About noon Clay spied a lone rider coming across the rolling vista of hills to the south. There was something familiar in the easy swing of shoulders and, as the figure came closer, he recognized the slim, buoyant outline of Bernice!

She rode boldly along the skylines as if she wanted to be seen. In her manner was none of the furtive caution of the man-hunters. When she dipped from view, Clay led Pardo along the treacherous trail to the tableland which had been his range of late; thence, in the saddle, he loped around the end of the canyon through brush and trees. Again he sighted her when he broke from timber. She was riding jauntily along the rim of the chasm.

Clay had resolved that if she was acting as decoy for a posse he would fight it out and have done with the business. If she had come into these wilds to seek him alone he knew there was nothing to fear.



AT HER cry of happiness, his doubts and distrust fled like foul things in the presence of cleanliness. She was clad in overalls and shirt again, and was on the ground in one lithe jump when Clay's racing horse brought him close to her. Clay, too, was out of the saddle as soon as she, and his arms found her a willing captive.

"Not so tight!" she begged, half laughing. "I need some breath to tell you the news. And I've brought you some food. Oh, Clay!" She gripped his shoulders with her small, gloved hands and regarded him with affectionate, eager eyes. "I can almost feel dad's benediction on us! Auntie Dishrow isn't dead! I've been all the way to Canutillo, not expecting to find her at all, but hoping that someone there could tell me the honest facts about your father's death.

"She's recovering from her illness and was so comical about it. She said she was about to give up when she suddenly got an idea that someone wanted her to die. So, out of pure contrariness, she set about it to get well—and she'll come to Hispana to testify that your mother did not bring you up to avenge a crime. It's almost uncanny, isn't it?" she queried. "Weagen wouldn't have dared to say what he did if he'd thought she was alive," she rushed on without waiting for a reply, "for Auntie has known the truth all the time but has kept her secret.

"Dad didn't kill your father at all; and, though your mother believed him guilty, she never told you. Auntie will swear to this."

Bernice was so much the little girl in her delight that Clay had to hug her again. Forgotten was hunger, weakness, solitude, and depression.

"I can swear to that, too," he rejoiced while she recovered her breath.

"Weagen is the guilty person!" she continued. "He was working for dad. There was a dispute with your father over a water-hole called El Capitan and Weagen was stationed by dad to guard the tank against stock watering there. Dad went to town and next morning Jim Torklin was found shot to death near El Capitan. Suspicion rested on dad because there was known to have been bad blood between the two men. Weagen, who had done the shooting, demanded protection, in the presence of Auntie Disbrow. Otherwise he said he would turn State's evidence and take dad along with him to prison or the gallows for having given the orders that brought about your father's death.

"Dad felt his responsibility. So, when he was indicted, he said nothing about Weagen but went into court and came out vindicated because Auntie furnished him with the necessary alibi. The tragic part is

that the people have always thought dad actually did the killing and that Auntie lied to save his neck.

"It was this that was partly responsible for dad leaving Canutillo. As you know, when I was born, four years after the tragedy, my mother died. So dad didn't have much reason to stay. He sold out, took me to his sister's in Dallas and finally landed in Chico Canyon. Weagen found out where he had located and followed, though dad left Canutillo, purposely during Weagen's absence, wanting to be rid of him forever."

Bernice paused thoughtfully.

"I've figured it out that dad didn't want me to hear that he'd been charged with murder," she went on. "He was afraid that, unless he went behind the court records to clear himself, I would believe as everyone else did that he'd been acquitted when he was really guilty. Weagen knew that dad couldn't prove anything except by Auntie's testimony, which was supposed to have been perjured and therefore might not carry much weight. So dad made concessions and allowed himself to be imposed on. He never balked at anything until Weagen wanted me. Then he rebelled. He wanted me to marry whom I chose. That's why I say I can almost feel his benediction on us now."

She poked into the gravel shyly with her boot toe.

"Honey," the unfamiliar word came from Clay with the humility of first love, "you've done all this for me——"

"For me," she corrected. "For us; for dad."

"Right," he agreed. "This gives us a better right to love each other, but it don't bring your dad's murderer to justice. An' Weagen ain't helpin' us any along that line, either. No, sir! Whoever shot Jerry Bolander did the sheriff a favor—for several reasons."

Clay enumerated on his fingers.

"First place, Mr. Bolander was the only living person, outside of Auntie Disbrow, who was supposed to be dead, who knew that Weagen had killed my father.

"In the second place, your dad's death helps to clear up the political situation. Clark Delevan told me that Mr. Bolander had withdrawn his political support from Weagen, which meant that a showdown would be forthcomin' *muy pronto* by either your dad or the sheriff telling what he knew about the other. With the lay as it is now, Weagen is relieved of the personal fight an' has the chance to win back the votes of Jerry Bolander's friends by relentlessly pursuin' the dead man's murderer an' hangin' him. Here's where I was luck to his hand; he had motive an' everythin' on me. No wonder he was so cordial when we met. My conviction wouldn't cost him a vote an' would satisfy your dad's political followin'.

"Third place, so long as your dad was alive, you had a protector——"

The girl's shudder as she comprehended her indirect part in the miserable tangle interrupted him.

"Without your dad, Weagen calculates that you'll turn to him to 'arbitrate' sheep off the range an' that you'll be grateful to him for his help."

"You think I'd put myself under obligations to him?" Bernice's eyes blazed.

"I'm just pointin' out why Weagen is indebted to the man who put your dad out o' the way," Clay soothed. "I have a hunch that if we find the party that use' to own the watch fob we'll uncover a trail that leads tolerable direct to Mr. Weagen!"

"You think he might have done it—himself?" Bernice was awed by this realm of speculation.

"I don't hardly think he did," Clay denied. "But he might 'a' used one o' this sheep crowd he's throwed in with by promisin' the protection o' his office. He had to do somethin' without delay, else he was due for political an' pers'nal shipwreck. You haven't made any progress in tracin' ownership o' the fob?"

"Not yet," she told him. "Haven't had time. I left right after the inquest and just got back yesterday. I would have started to work then, but I learned that the search for you had been abandoned in this section and couldn't resist the temptation to meet you."

"I'm not goin' to live like a coyote much longer," Clay asserted determinedly. "Get me a good lawyer—Trice Threkild in Albuquerque is a dandy—so I can have some legal advice as to what I ought to d' to protect myself. A week from tonight I'll slip into Chico an' come to the house——"

"But the ranch may be watched," she objected.

"I'd thought o' that. If the coast's clear, put this handkerchief o' mine—" He reached into the customary pocket for the reliable bandanna that had served him so well. "Why—it ain't here. I'd forgotten," he grinned. "I dropped it the day I went on the dodge."

"I have it," she smiled, groping inside her shirt. "I washed it."

"Keep it then," he urged. "Put it on that flat rock to the right of the trail as you enter Chico from the mesa if it's safe for me to come in. If the signal ain't there, I'll know there's somethin' wrong."

CLAY counted not only the sunrises and sunsets but the hours as well during the next week, reciting his poem diligently when time palled on him. He rode, on the appointed day, through the broken country while there was yet daylight. At nightfall he was on the mesa, keeping to such cover as was available. He used utmost caution in approaching the entrance of Chico, and the bitterness of disappointment mingled with a sort of dread when the looked-for handkerchief was not in the expected place.

He recoinnoitered, found no indications of danger after a careful survey of the trail and the neighboring hills, and led Pardo through the gap in the rimrock. Clay had counted on this rendezvous with Bernice and did not propose to be cheated out of it.

"Maybe she didn't weigh the handkerchief down heavy enough an' it blew away," was his thought as he again mounted his pony.

He carried his six-shooter at ready, proceeding cautiously down-canyon. A half mile from the ranch he guided Pardo from the bridle path and abandoned him; thence Clay picked a course along the south slope of Chico until he was directly above Bolander Plateau.

A light was burning in the house. Clay instantly surmised that someone had come, preventing Bernice from leaving the place. He had an overwhelming curiosity to know who the visitor might be. Weagen? Delevan from Gigante? Frisbee or Harrold, making peace overtures or threats?

Starlight, aided by a faint new moon, showed three horses in the corral. Bernice's night horse would be among them. The other two must belong to her guests.

Clay crept to the east side of the building, which was shadowed, and peered through a window into the living-room-kitchen.

Trice Threkild was there, and Sheriff Weagen was seated beside him. Bernice was entertaining the pair,—or, rather, Threkild, thin to cadaverousness, middle-aged, and of humorous mien, was being entertained by the general situation. He was tilted back in his chair, smoking a cigar.

"—no place for a lone girl in Chico," the sheriff was saying. "Listen to reason. Marry me an' I'll protect y'ur int'rests against sheepmen."

"Perhaps," Threkild cleared his throat deliberately and broke into speech, "Mr. Weagen isn't informed that, since there has been such widespread newspaper publicity to the Torklin case, the Department of the Interior has ordered this entire district to be surveyed so that boundary lines can be determined without gun-fights. Special writers for the papers have attributed Jerry Bolander's death to a range feud and point to the fact that the deceased had filed application to purchase outright all the land he needed to protect himself. Miss Bernice will succeed to her father's rights and will, therefore, need no protection against sheep invasion."

"Queer, isn't it," the lawyer inquired, mildly but meaningly, "that the newspapers should persist in the belief that the wrong man has been indicted for the shooting of Mr. Bolander?"

Trice gazed quizzically at the sheriff, squinting his eyes through tobacco smoke.

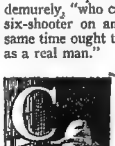
"You keep your noisy mouth out o' this," Weagen snapped. "Go outside, as I've invited y'u to do a dozen times."

"Miss Bernice, whose ranch I understand this is, has as frequently invited me to stay," Threkild retorted suavely.

Weagen ignored this.

"Y'u need a man around here," he turned to the girl. "A man," he emphasized. "Not a fly-by-night outlaw. I'll forget y'ur hysterics when Clay Torklin left if y'u'll just be sensible an' take me."

"A male person," Bernice commented demurely, "who can kiss a girl and use his six-shooter on an *escaping* sheriff at the same time ought to, it seems to me, qualify as a real man."



CLAY, listening to the repartee, could scarcely repress a giggle. Weagen was not having a very good time.

"By the way, Sheriff," Threkild interposed, "is nobody except Torklin under suspicion for the killing of Jerry Bolander? It would seem to me that some of the sheepmen with whom Bolander was at logger-heads would at least be questioned."

"The business of the sheriff's office,"

Weagen declared pompously, "is attended to by me. I got this watch fob from the citizens of Hispana in appreciation of my work," he opened his coat and touched an object on his vest pridefully. Clay could not see the fob, but the swift change of expression on Bernice's face was illuminating.

"When did you get it, Sheriff?" she asked. Her voice was noticeably strained.

"Just a few days ago," Weagen answered noncommittally. "Why?"

"I didn't see you wearing it when I was in town last week."

"Well," Weagen corrected an inaccuracy, "I've really had it for sev'ral weeks, but there was a slight defect in workmanship an' I sent it to the manufacturer for repairs. What the hell?" he demanded hoarsely. "What are you two lookin' at each other that way for? What's up? What's the lay?"

"Oh, nothing," Threkild filled in the awkward gap. "Miss Bernice and I were merely commenting to ourselves what an odd emblem to present to a sheriff."

"No, that ain't what y'u had in mind." Weagen stood up, his suspicions fully aroused by the lawyer's smooth reply. "Out with it!" He glared at Threkild and placed a threatening hand on the butt of his sidearm.

Bernice was on her feet and between the men in a flash.

"You are a miserable, yellow coward!" She faced Weagen, quaintly mannish in her masculine riding costume. "You hadn't the brains or courage to arrest Clay Torklin, but you threaten an unarmed man. I'll tell you why we're interested in that fob. It's because Clay found an exact replica of it at the spot where my dad's murderer knelt and shot him to death! The one bullet dad fired tore it from the killer's watch strap—and *you* had the lost medallion duplicated!"

Clay, watching the tableau, exulted in the girl's superb fearlessness; but her indiscretion in denouncing Weagen at this time disturbed him not a little.

The sheriff's face mottled. He puffed. Clay, breathless, gripped his revolver and half raised it, fearful that Weagen's impulse to kill might overcome his intelligence. But Threkild rose to the occasion—and probably saved his own life—by coolly blowing a smoke ring.

"My dear," he reproved Bernice, "isn't this something of an anti-climax? Hadn't such a matter better be threshed out in court?"

"You said somethin'," Weagen aimed a thin smile at Threkild. "No man could say such a thing to me an' get away with it alive. I'll answer Bernice at the proper time."

He retreated toward the door.

Clay knew, as well as if Weagen had spoken his intention, that the sheriff was about to make his escape. Weagen dared not face a court. His only recourse was flight.

Clay crept through the darkness to the front of the house and softly entered, coming up behind Weagen.

"I'll trouble y'u to put 'em up again," he ordered, placing the muzzle of his .45 squarely between the bulging cords of the officer's neck.

A less desperate man would have complied; but the sheriff had lost honor, position, and even liberty within the past few moments. He would be a hunted thing, a known murderer, instead of a reputable official unless he could turn this emergency to his advantage. He knew that Torklin was not a killer; knew that Clay would jeopardize his own life rather than take another's. He realized, with the cunning of despair, that the gun at his neck was mostly bluff.

If he could silence Torklin forever and take from him the damning evidence, Bernice's oath that the medallion had been found at the scene of the murder would carry no weight in law against his word that it had never been lost. He would hold the whip hand again! Clay would simply be "killed while resisting arrest."

Instead of throwing up his hands the sheriff ducked his head, whirled, dodged, drew his gun and fired. Clay, taken by surprise, could not shoot without danger of hitting Bernice or Threkild with a wild bullet. He felt a shattering blow on his left shoulder; then dropped to his knees as another bullet crashed into the wall above his head.

Clay, strangely calm, observed that the non-combatants had thrown themselves flat on the floor and that Weagen was backing rapidly to an inside doorway where he would have the protection of a pine board partition.

Clay squeezed the trigger three times at this moving target. A stinging agony gripped his left side and fastened again into his right leg. He saw Weagen lurch and noted that the sheriff's gun dangled, muzzle down, on one finger; heard him cough. Clay tried to straighten up, but had neither the strength nor the use of his right leg.

He felt himself falling; then was caught in a soft, warm embrace.

He had a grotesque sensation that he and Weagen were swimming in air, crazily shooting silent guns at each other; that someone had put out the lamp, leaving him footless and alone to sink in impenetrable blackness. He yelled that Weagen was escaping, but there was no one to hear; and the darkness closed in from above and below, supporting and at the same time smothering him.

CLAY blinked into a ray of light. He was surprised to find himself in a strange bed. Afternoon sun streamed through a west window. His left arm was trussed across his chest. His right leg was rigidly encased in something unyielding. Both members ached intolerably and stabbing pains assailed him elsewhere. He looked up into the grinning, cadaverous face of Trice Threkild.

"Weagen?" the invalid inquired briefly.

"The coronor has him in Hispana," came the equally terse reply.

"I'm under arrest, I suppose?"

"Technically. I've given bond for your appearance. I think I'm safe in gambling that you won't run out on me for a while yet," the attorney commented dryly. "Left shoulder and right leg broken. A floating rib has been amputated by the capable M. D. whom Mr. Delevan summoned from town. Something like a pint of lead, more or less, has been extracted from your corpus. You were practically sunk before you fired a shot.

"Lord, man," Threkild complained, "I thought you never would get into action. You waited like a cavalier until Miss Bernice and I got to cover, and then planted three slugs of lead in Weagen's heart within a radius of one inch."

"I didn't aim to kill him—at first," Clay sighed.

"You just saved the citizens of Hispana a lynching bee. I understand from Mr. Delevan, who carried tidings of the battle and gave his own version of the case—beginning with Weagen's killing your father, including the manner in which he hounded Bolander, murdered him and framed you for the crime, and also touching vividly upon the late and already somewhat celebrated duel. Public sentiment is with you, my boy. Feeling pretty pert? I'm supposed to keep you quiet in case of a return to consciousness, and the best way to do it was to give you the local gossip."

He tucked the covers under the patient's chin.

"Now you can go to sleep. If you don't I'll call the doc, who's outside with Bernice and Delevan."

Clay, looking past the lawyer, saw Bernice, poised breathlessly with one hand to the breast of a frilly frock. There was a world of yearning and joy in her eyes. She sped across the uncarpeted floor and knelt at the bedside, patting Clay's bearded cheeks with a motherly caress.

"You'll live!" she cried.

"Heavens, yes," Threkild agreed, leaving his chair. "He might even love, too; you can't tell. You'll excuse me please?" he requested politely.

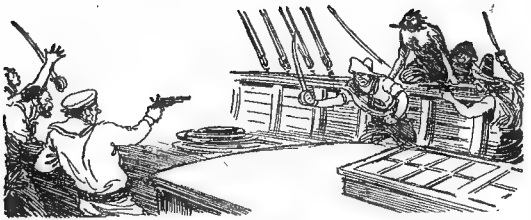
For a moment he waited for a reply. Then, receiving none, he tiptoed to the door.

"Well, all right," he complained. "I'll go anyhow and let you get lonesome."

STRAWBERRIES GROW OVER ICE

WHEN the old "forty-niners" crossed the Continental Divide at South Pass, Wyoming, they discovered ripe strawberries in July growing among the tall grass on the north slope of the mountains. By taking a spade and lifting out a square of turf, to transplant one of these roots, clear ice six inches or more in thickness was exposed eight inches below the surface. Within two hundred feet of the same spot mint was growing, and some who crossed in 1852 made "mint julep," iced, on the Fourth of July.

The phenomenon is explained by the frequent occurrence of small slides and the rapid melting of snow, which carries some soil and deposits it over the accumulation of ice. There is sufficient warmth from the sun for a few hours each day to start grass and other plants growing, but not enough to melt the ice beneath to any great extent. After three or four years the ice would disappear from beneath these meadows, a little of it melting out each summer. At the same time other like areas were in process of formation in the neighborhood.—H. F. G.



PETTICOAT MAROONERS

By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM
Author of " The Trail of Doom"

Bloody cutlasses flashing, pistols firing, shouting and cursing, Bart Skyrm's choice crew of cutthroats swarmed over the rail of the Vengeance *whenever the pirate seized upon another victim—and always in the lead was the grim and deadly Bideford Kit*

HOLD, Frank! Enough!" Littlejohn panted desperately as back and back I pressed him with flashing attack in *tierce* and *quarte*, laughing as my bright rapier buzzed and sang about his blade.

We dropped points and the *Speedwell's* brawny first mate mopped his red face and grinned at me ruefully.

"Ye do well enough, Sam," said I. "As sailors go ye are quite formidable with that heavy cutting-blade, but ye should admit that your clumsy cutlass is a toy for deadliness, compared to the snake-like fang of the straight rapier that needs to sting but once."

"Oh, aye! Ye had the better o' that bout," he shrugged. "But I would as soon take a needle in hand as that bodkin, for all that ye wield it so deftly."

So we leaned upon the bulwark to catch breath and I stared out across those sullen Atlantic rollers, over which for weary weeks of storm and calm that ship had borne us from Plymouth harbor. No sail shining anywhere upon that green waste all around us, though now the *Speedwell* was near enough to the Carolinas to be speaking the coastwise traders. Had wolves harried the sheep into shelter? I wondered.

"Take up the account of the bloody marooners, Sam," I urged my friend.

Only two years before, in the year of 1716, Littlejohn had been prisoner aboard the sloop of that arch-freebooter, Rackham. To me, fresh from irksome quiet in my native Devon, my friend's adventures vastly excelled in interest the most lurid pirate tales of the penny pamphlets.

"The marooners? Aye," Littlejohn nodded absently.

Following the turn of his tawny head, I marked that he stared at Elias Hartley, the huge, black visaged second mate, where he drove the watch a-caulking the captain's gig.

"Ye speak of them as something foreign," growled Littlejohn very grimly. "Ha! Such devil-spawn as that yonder is no better than Blackbeard's crew! Given invitation, Frank, and nine of each ten of those, including their officer, would be most blithe to hoist the Roger!" He faced outward now, honest blue eyes narrowed.

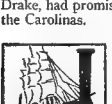
"There's a feeling i' my bones, Frank, Grant that we meet no rovers this voyage, else ye may see those tarry-thumbs yonder turn upon us. There would be no joyful meeting with your good uncle, lad; no soft berth for ye in Charles Town Colony. Nay, instead, a slit gullet and damp bed beneath our keel, most like. I tell ye, Captain Fanshaw shows himself poor servant of his owners by the lax watch we keep

these days. Mark ye yonder." He jerked a thumb at the green emptiness ahead.

"That strip into which we come now is chosen hunting-ground of marooner, buccaneer, pirate! True, they nest chiefly at New Providence in the Bahamas, but it is whispered that certain high officials of North Carolina Colony know a deal more of marooners' lairs along that coast than honest men ever learn. Aye! Know much of the weight of pirate-gold. Strange tales are told, Frank, but wise men keep stopper on the tongue. Enough for the shipman to slip through each voyage with unslit throat. Let His Majesty's commissioners hunt out these seahawk roosts. And yet——"

"We should raise Charles Town within the week." With the spell of my own words I fell into a pleasant, golden daydream, fingering Joyce's locket which the lass, half-sobbing, half-laughing, had hung about my neck that night before my departure from Bideford for Plymouth.

Once ashore in Charles Town and my new life began. There would I hew out a patrimony from the virgin land, of which my uncle penned such glowing reports. A year or two, and Joyce would follow. An orphan, owner of no more than an Italian rapier, there had seemed small chance for me, the last sprig of the ancient Devonshire tree, to sprout prosperously in England. Hence my one near relative, Major Giles Drake, had promised me kindly welcome in the Carolinas.



N THE days while I waited most impatiently for the coast of America to lift beyond the *Speedwell's* gilded figurehead, I found myself gripped by Life, an odd thing of many sections, each wonderfully like another for all superficial differences, at sea as on the land.

I mean that through the long days I ate and slept and day-dreamed; marked the sailors chanting at their ropes or paced the deck and watched ship-business; found a good friend, some indifferently liked acquaintances, and—an enemy. Littlejohn was that friend; the huge, bluff mariner was the sort one cleaves to, loving well for sturdy honesty of soul. Captain Fanshaw, the ship's pompous master, with Master Amos Pettigrew, a stolid, paunchy Charles Town merchant, were chief of the acquaintances. The enemy? Well, Elias Hartley, the surly second mate, had seemed from the very first to discover a myriad points in me to rouse dislike. I admit that I hated him thoroughly on sight, with the impetuous habit of two-and-twenty.

While Hartley often watched the morning-bout between Littlejohn and me, never did he offer to cross blades with either. Always he wore a superior sneer, as if disdaining to show his own marvelous skill in such company. More than once I came mighty near to skinning hand-back upon his horse-teeth, but I was minded to face my good uncle and patron with no record of petty brawls a-shipboard. Too, Captain Fanshaw had observed how matters stood and threatened irons to him who quarreled.

Littlejohn was now staring aft. Turning lazily, I marked that Captain Fanshaw had come on deck. My companion eyed him steadily, then, with a long breath as if he prepared to dive into chill waters, aft went Littlejohn to stand before the master. For a moment or two they talked —or Littlejohn did, most respectfully, while Captain Fanshaw raked the horizon with brass spyglass and seemed barely to heed. Suddenly he whirled and shook knotted fist beneath his mate's nose.

"Curse ye for a long-tongued meddler!" bellowed the captain. "I need no beardless landsman-turned-cuny to counsel me what precautions I should take! Get for'ard about your business, before I log ye for insubordination! When I see need for double-lookouts and arms on deck, time enough for them. Meanwhile, get for'ard!"

Until after the noonday meal Littlejohn went about his work with angry face. When he came up to where I lounged amidships, something past three bells of the afternoon watch, I marked that his cutlass hung at his side, not a usual thing. But I made no remark and we leaned upon the bulwark to stare outboard. So blue was the sea that it seemed almost as if the May sky had changed place with the water and we ploughed the very heavens themselves. A tiny land-bird fluttered about the rigging, like a harbinger of peace. I jogged Littlejohn's arm to show him, but as we looked upward the lookout stiffened at the masthead, leaning forward with broad hand gripping a stay.

"*Sail-ho!*" roared the seaman mightily.

Instantly Littlejohn was gone from me. He swarmed up the weather-shrouds like a great ape to stand, a brawny, alert figure, beside the seaman lookout.

Captain Fanshaw had heard the hail. He but nodded when Littlejohn cupped his hand and proclaimed the stranger a large sloop. Then the mate descended and with a glance at his oak-brown face I had a strange crinkling of the spine. Instinctively my hand clenched hard on rapier-hilt. He passed me with wide mouth set grim and hard beneath his golden mustache. Straight aft and up to Fanshaw he went.

"Cap'n," said Littlejohn boldly, "ye may call me long-tongued and a meddler once more, an ye like, but ye know that I was for long a prisoner of the notorious murderer Rackham. Well do I know the rake of rascal-mast, and if yonder sloop is an honest fellow—why, call Satan an archangel!"

"Why," sneered Fanshaw, looking him up and down, "I do believe your time of captivity clean addled your few poor wits! Ye are forever finding desperate cutthroats on every poor trader's deck. Get ye for'ard about your business! Get for'ard!" he bellowed in sudden gusty fury, when Littlejohn seemed about to speak. "For'ard, or by God, ye shall be dragged there in irons!"

Nearer and nearer bore the sloop, until even the bellying of her dingy canvas was plain. She flew the British ensign and held on a course that promised to cross our stern. Fanshaw watched her, as did the gaping seamen of the watch, but the captain's broad, choleric face was scornfully placid as he discoursed with Master Pettigrew.

"Some small trader," I heard Fanshaw tell the grave merchant, "but my mate sees gory destruction behind every passing sail. An I heeded him, we should have the *Speedwell* flying before every sighted vessel. But——"

He broke off to stare more keenly at the stranger.

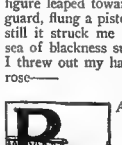
Straight for our side the sloop bore on. Less than two hundred land-yards now separated us. Suddenly, while we gaped, the handful of men about the sloop's deck was swelled by tenfold. A shrill exultant yell from these, then the broad, red ensign shot downward from the gaff; a murky ball replaced it, that broke in the breeze to show the dread white skull and crossbones on an inky field. A bow-chaser barked savagely and a ball went dancing over the wavetops past our side.

"Bart Skyrm and the *Vengeance!*" bellowed Littlejohn. "To arms, Captain Fanshaw! The pirate Skyrm! To arms, ye fools! To arms—for your lives!"

Even had Fanshaw instantly heeded the warning, the penalty of his remissness was to be collected. Before our addled wits might work, the sloop surged deftly alongside and her grappling-irons held her to us. Over our bulwark swarmed a fierce, half-naked pack, cutlasses flashing silvery, daggers between grinning teeth, shoulder-belts bearing up a half-dozen pistols each over tanned and hairy chests. Mechanically I sprang forward, singling out a swarthy ruffian in velvet breeches who yelled wolfishly in the van.

From the corner of my eye I marked Littlejohn leaping aft toward me, then my blade engaged the pirate's cutlass and I saw nothing but my opponent. Bull-strong he was and active as any cat, but—my father it was who taught me fence and he had been called second of the two best swordsmen in all England, favorite pupil of Descarte the Master; and once he had owned to me that I was almost his better. With the click of crossing steel came an odd preoccupation, almost calmness. I evaded Velvet Breeches' mighty, awkward downstroke, interposing my blade at the slant proper to deflect the heavy cutlass outward. As mechanically as if in the *salle du armes*, I executed a *demi-volte* that placed me on the rover's left, then feinted in *prime* at the face, recovered flashingly and over his thick wrist the rapier-point darted in—to skewer his heart.

It had all taken but an instant. One might have believed that he had stumbled against my point. Flushed with the quick success, I jerked free my blade and turned. Littlejohn fought like a flailing madman in the center of a fierce group. Captain Fanshaw I saw fall, where he stood beside Master Pettigrew, who was laying about him lustily with a cutlass. Then a dapper figure leaped toward me and, as I fell on guard, flung a pistol at me. I ducked, but still it struck me upon the forehead. A sea of blackness surged up before me! as I threw out my hands to swim, its waves rose——



PAINFULLY I opened my eyes, blinking dizzily in the sunlight that slanted down into my face. Hard planking I felt beneath me; straight ahead I marked a coil of rope and stupidly my eyes followed the snaky turns of the coiling until at the top a single strand

went aloft. A ladder was there. Still gripped by slight vertigo, I blinked bemusedly, at last recognizing in that ladder a ship's shrouds. Still at sea! Instantly all the day's events rushed back to me. I considered sitting up to learn the results of our combat.

The cluttered deck seemed much as usual and yet there was somewhere an odd difference. At last it came to my dazed brain that this was not the *Speedwell!* At that instant I became aware of voices behind me which I must have heard for seconds without conscious note of them. Words became distinct as my addled wits cleared; sentences delivered in a soft, almost lisping voice that for all its silken courtesy was surcharged with a deadly menace that even I could not mistake.

"Why, must I say again, Bart Skyrm, that he is my prisoner? Oh, Body o' God, but I do detest repetition! Must I ask ye that which I know—who tapped him upon the noddle, fair Captain? Who it was brought him aboard here?"

"And in the Devil's name—" this was a tremendous bellowing, but not half so sinister as that girl-like voice it answered —"why *did* ye bring him? What use to us this smooth-face? We are overcrowded now. I say, tip up his heels on the side!"

"Nay, dear Captain," mocked the silken voice, more softly than before, yet with a something in the tone that made me shiver, so deadly was its quality. "Nay. He stays—because I wish it so. Pray chew on that."

"Who is captain here?" roared the other furiously. "Since when has quartermaster overridden captain?"

"When? Why, since any time, Bart Skyrm. Since now, an' ye must set a moment. Precedents, dear bully, must be made sometime."

Most cautiously I had edged around to see as well as hear. A half-score feet away, but so engrossed in their quarrel as to be heedless of me, stood two men. One was a slender figure scarce as tall as myself, seeming little more than a boy, he who had flung pistol in my face. He was most elegantly arrayed now in plum-velvet breeches and purple silken doublet, a kerchief of the same material bound tightly about the skull.

The others whom somehow I knew to be Bart Skyrm, seemed a very giant by contrast to his fellow's slimness. His apparel was no less rich than the other's; from neck to knee he wore crimson damask, with a broad Spanish hat flaunting a scarlet feather. A gold chain about his neck upheld a great diamond-studded cross; two pairs of silver-mounted pistols dangled at the end of a silken sling flung over a wide shoulder. His cutlass was sheathed at his side.

"Aye! Must outface captain now," sighed Sir Purple Kerchief languishingly. His blade, heavier, broader, than most, was out, point to deck, brass hilt gripped by shapely brown hand. "Ye are master but for navigating and command in battle, Bart Skyrm. For these purposes the worthy company elected ye, according to our articles. As easy to tumble from the perch, remember! As quartermaster, I am spokesman for the crew—your master. More I——"

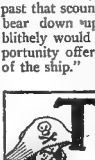
Up flicked the cutlass in a sinister half-arc. Half of the saucy plume from Bart Skyrm's Spanish hat fluttered to the deck.

"Have it as ye will, Kit," shrugged Skyrm at this hint. "I care not."

As I swayed to my feet the slender Kit faced me. I studied this strange pirate very shrewdly, for, if the *Vengeance's* master wished me ill, it behooved me to know my friends. For a moment we faced each other and I found myself fascinated by the rover's wide, black eyes. Strangely opaque they were, yet lit as from some smouldering fire behind; mocking, sardonic as a devil's yet—I fancied—just then carelessly friendly toward me.

Stammeringly I began thanks for my salving from Bart Skyrm's barbarity. Kit's full, pouting red mouth curved faintly.

"Belay, belay," shrugged the rover. "Ye are my prisoner, pretty boy. I' faith, too gallant a cockerel to mount the block just yet. When I saw ye face Tom Davie and by some sheer gift o' fortune slay him, I loved ye for it, lad. But, though ye are under my wing aboard the *Vengeance* and I am not without some small repute among this hell-broth, I counsel ye to walk warily past that scoundrel, Skyrm. He dares not bear down upon me openly, but right blithely would he toss ye overside, an opportunity offered. Otherwise ye are free of the ship."



THEN dragged by five of the strangest, dreariest days of my life. Warily indeed I moved about the pirate-sloop, as might a cat treading gently in and out among pools of dirty water.

sturdy, foul-mouthed,

bloody-minded rogues of divers nations the crew numbered, the villainous majority being English. To my mind it seemed that seventy-and-seven were constantly in some part drunk, for part of the loot of the *Speedwell* had been a good store of liquors. A broached hogshead stood ever by the foremast, free to any guzzler.

None hindered me in my aimless, disconsolate roving about the *Vengeance*, for Bideford Kit, as I found the quartermaster named in this company, had passed the word among them and it seemed that none cared to face those mocking black eyes, that gentle tongue and heavy blade. Much was I alone, far for'ard in the sloop's eyes, to stare vacantly and melancholically across blue sea to the horizon-rim. The *Speedwell*, I knew, had been permitted to proceed to Charles Town, with third mate as master, Fanshaw being dead and Littlejohn wounded desperately; her holds plundered of all these pirates fancied. Her topmasts had been chopped down to keep her, as the rascals grinned, from "too eagerly setting the bulldogs—the men o' war—upon the *Vengeance's* heels."

Over and over I wondered what my uncle might say and do when he knew that I had been dragged aboard the rover-craft. Doubtless he would grieve, but small opportunity would he have of doing more. For though His Majesty, heeding the prayers of the colony officials, had despatched the *Phenix* and *Greyhound* men o' war to the Carolinas, such swift vessels as the marooner's had ever their heels.

Thoughts of escape ran ever in my mind, but a means of effecting deliverance from this wild-beast company was more than my brain might fathom. There was no boat light enough for a single man to launch and govern. Too, the shores, even if by mighty swimming I might gain them, were but wildernesses peopled by savage beasts and more savage men. Charles Town Colony, I knew by letters of my uncle, had of late but ended a long, fierce war with the red men. So, should I fall into the hands of the aborigines, my fate must be a cruel, lingering death. Thus I mused, fingering Joyce's locket.

Thrice did Kit offer me chance to sign the rovers' articles, surely the oddest partnership-agreements ever conceived by mortal men—so heedful of all niceties of deportment 'twixt rogue and rogue; so scrupulous to lay down the proper method of committing murder, theft, or rape. So might I become a full-fledged freebooter. But had I ever yearned for the daring livelihood of the sea-wolves, my days with these had cured me quite of those boyish fancies.

Most vividly, in that gentle, lisping voice of Kit's, was painted for me all the hot delight of a pirate's life: the fierce battles, the goodly loot, the wild joy of strewing broad gold-pieces among the brothels and dens of New Providence. When I refused shortly, Kit made no move toward coercion.

"Why, ye are a fool, Frank," shrugged Kit, for in some degree had we become intimate. "What have the fat shore-staying folk to compare with the myriad pleasures of us Brethren of the Coasts? To swink and sweat the day through, then go ox-like to bed; governed by a thousand thousand laws in which they have no part save to obey; amassing wealth which, granted that no stronger hand snatches it away, they never enjoy. Then to die like stalled cattle on a bed of straw. Pah! No life for a bold blade, that!"

"Nay," I made quick answer. "Ye draw but part of the picture, Kit. All shore-keeping folk are not like that: To serve one's king in a strange, wild land, warring bravely with wild beasts and wilder men; conquering new empires for the glory of Old England; laying, it may be, foundation for a great, daughter-province to be one day coequal with the mother. That I count labor worthy of the bravest, noblest men. I tell ye frankly, Kit, such beast-capers as these of the *Vengeance's* people make my gorge rise. No better than ravening swine do I count the self-styled Brethren. Too much of wanton, cowardly cruelty I find in the days of success; nothing to look forward to but a felon's dance on nothing at Execution Dock, or, at best, a foot of cold, bright steel like that I gave your famous swordsman, Tom Davie!"

"Well, each to his taste, young Long-Face!" mocked Kit. "But—here is a friend, Frank. Mark how he eyes us pleasantly! One day—" the voice lisped deadly, and the black eyes held a reddish tinge—"I shall—cut me—that tall—cock's comb."

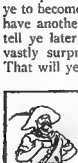
The passer was Hartley. The *Speedwell's* villainous second mate, with a half-score of the crew, were also newcomers on the *Vengeance*. No sooner had the pirates swarmed over the bulwark than this traitor and most of his watch had cried for quarter and chance to join the rascal-company; had aided in overpowering the faithful of the *Speedwell*. He had signed rover-articles gaily and, after kissing the Bible

in the presence of the assembled rogues, had vowed himself the blithest scoundrel on the seas.

Passing me about the decks, Hartley had ever a scowl and oath to spare. He fingered cutlass-hilt suggestively and often did my fingers itch for the feel of my lost rapier-pommel. But I had no chance to lesson him. No weapon was permitted me; did I but glance at the arms-rack in the fo'cas'le there was ever some one to step between with knowing grin. So I choked back my swelling hatred as best I might.

Kit, jealous of the post of quartermaster, which in that queer-governed company carried authority even greater than the captain's, fancied that Hartley worked to secure election to that office. Hence the threat to deal with the huge recruit.

"Well," shrugged Kit now, in answer to my objections, "whate'er befalls for good or ill, Frank, 'tis all 'Marooners' Luck,' as we phrase it. We take our chances with well-opened eyes. But I'll not bear upon ye to become one o' the fraternity. Nay—have another thought i' my noodle. Will tell ye later what I scheme—and ye'll be vastly surprised, I promise ye! Ho-ho! That will ye!"



IT WAS in the gray dawning of my sixth day of captivity that I marked an unusual activity among these rogues, who ordinarily snored late. Now they massed about the foremast for one of the disorderly conferences with which they settled disputes or planned a course of action. Pannikins of rum were dipped freely from a hogshead and the uproar and ribald argument increased in natural ratio to the number of times each rover-whistle was wetted.

Kit I found in their center, one jackboot toe comfortably lifted upon a brandy cask, talking in that mocking lisp I knew so well, gesturing daintily with pannikin. Then disgustedly I moved aft to be away from them, but the babel of their hoarse voices carried to me plainly. Occasionally whole words and snatches of sentences reached me. Apparently, Kit placed before them some proposal which seemed to find general, if by no means silent, approval. Suddenly above the frowsy heads rose up the stocky figure of one-eyed Bristol Dick, the boatswain, as he mounted upon the rum-hogshead.

"Now, hark ye!" bellowed Dick, who fancied himself a sea-lawyer and was forever arguing like a very London bigwig upon the delicate shades of meaning in the rovers' naïve articles. "Hark ye! Kit's scheme is good, but, by God, 'tis a matter demanding some clearness i' expounding, which I alone may give ye. So hark ye, gentlemen, I will make all plain for ye.

"Regarding o' the scheme, I have to say that, I am as good a rover as any o' ye. Damn my eyes if ever Bristol Dick turned back to any man i' his life or ever will, by God! So, when I speak regarding o' this cruise, ye may well listen. Aye! Now, I tell ye plainly, gentlemen, we should make this cruise."

With which lucid and learned comment, Bristol Dick descended solemnly from his rostrum and from it dipped a new pannikin. There came a great uproar of applause from the company, amid which Kit shouldered out of the press and swaggered aft to where Bart Skyrm paced the deck with uneasy eye cocked toward the assemblage for'ard—which, by the articles, ruled him, and which he was not privileged to join. As Kit passed me silently, I noticed a sardonic grin of the oddest. It puzzled me.

"Captain," said Kit to Bart Skyrm, "the worshipful company has assembled in due accord with our articles to set the course o' future employment. Now, we weary o' this bootless cruising up and down. We desire to find somewhat with which to lade flapping pockets. So has the company voted to cruise fairly up to the entrance o' Charles Town harbor and see what wares the merchants have to offer us gentlemen."

"Blood o' the devil!" roared Skyrm in furious amaze. "Do ye cursed lack-wits not know that two great bulldogs now patrol those waters, commissioned to lay by heels and neck all o' our trade who rejected the King's Amnesty o' last December?"

"Why, as to that," Kit returned, after thoughtful study of fingernails, "we consider the risk but lightly. Ye might say that we fear but one thing—to be poor men! Our worthy brother, Blackbeard, feared not to face the honest citizens closely, so neither do we. I' the name o' the worshipful company, Captain Skyrm, I lay it upon ye to turn ship and steer for Charles Town."

"Never, by God!" vowed Skyrm, and from brown his face altered to the gray of woodash. "'Tis plainest madness!

will nothing serve ye fools but Execution Dock?"

"Execution Dock—" murmured Kit dreamily, then whistled a catch and began to sing the words:

"Many a gallant rover
Once bedecked wi' golden chain,
Sailing wide sea over
Combing close the Spanish Main;
Now has come to port at last,
Found a place 'mid famous rank;
By the neck is now laid fast;
Iron, not gold, his chains that clank,
In Execution Dock!"

Kit ended, to eye Skyrm sardonically.

"Ah, ye forget," he reminded. "Ye are always forgetting, o' late. By our articles 'tis the crew sets the course. Ye have now to put about for Charles Town or I fear me another captain is like to be chosen."

Apparently, Bart Skyrm found either horn of his dilemma sharp enough. He interposed more objections until Kit's ungovernable temper broke through the lackadaisical air 'twas a whim to assume. Yet the only sign of demoniacal rage lay in the increased softness of his lisping voice, the insane, reddish shine of wide, black eyes. In tone befitting the lover reciting a sonnet to his lady's eyebrow, came a torrent of foulest curses.

"Ah, me," Kit ended, "I fear ye lack the spirit o' the lowly louse. Better for us to choose another captain. Once for all, I say put the sloop about or—I greatly fear ye may not dodge paying the piper!"

With that, Kit whirled about and sauntered for'ard again. Coming abreast of me, my protector-captor eyed me long, with enigmatic curving of full, self-willed mouth.

"Come for'ard wi' me, Frank," commanded Kit. "Have somewhat to say to ye."

So side by side we came up to the gathering at the hogshead. They had listened, grinning, to Kit's ultimatum and now they crowded up with a hundred questions. Smilingly Kit waved them off and dipped up a pannikin of rum. This downed with foppish daintiness and *cigarro* lighted from the burning hemp-strand kept there, Kit moved away, beckoning me to follow. We dropped to the deck beside the bulwark and after a moment Kit blew out a cloud of blue-white smoke and eyed me slantingly, with strange, eager flame in the opaque black eyes.

"Well, Frank, heard me lay our will upon that fine-feathered craven, Skyrm?"

At my puzzled nod Kit smiled faintly.

"*Our* will—ah, but 'twas Kit o' Bideford put the notion in the crew's thick head. Guess ye for whom I did it? Why, for Frank Heardman, none other."

Then wild hope sprang up in me. Kit planned to near the shore, near Charles Town, and so give me opportunity for deliverance. The next words dashed my joy right speedily.

"'Tis so that we may swiftly fill our hold and head for New Providence, Frank," Kit continued. "I itch to be there quickly and—never would ye guess why."

The slender figure leaned tensely toward me; never had I seen so gentle an expression upon the comely brown face, in the fiery, opaque black eyes.

"Guess ye who I am?" Kit stared with odd imperiousness into my eyes.

"Beelzebub, an' ye ask me!" I returned sulkily; for shattering of my hope left me void of interest in riddling.

"Nay, be not angry, Frank, Bideford Kit ye have heard them name me. Aye! Among this villain-pack is none that knows more; not one but whom I might master easily with one hand. Yet—ye had not guessed that I am—a woman?"

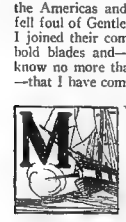
I stiffened, to gape bemusedly, but in sheer unbelief! This cutlass-wielding, foul-mouthed cutthroat, fiercest blade of all that wild-beast company, a member of the same sex as—as Joyce! Preposterous I found it. Such a thing came only in the mad absurdities of dream-stuff!

"Aye! Bideford Kit they name me, yet was I christened Kate. Ah, me! I played with dolls like any other girl-child, but now— The tale is long and ye need know only that from childhood petticoats irked me sore. So at sixteen, after the fiercest of many quarrels with my guardian, I e'en snipped my hair and donned breeches and was away, a sturdy boy, bound for London Town.

"There I fell in with a player-troupe and for three years trod the boards in Master Shakespeare's rôles. A mad, mad life. Sometimes we had plenty, an' our entertainment found a patron of open purse, but often we lacked tapster's toll. Always I kept mine own counsel and so escaped unmasking. Why, even the women were befooled! I mind me a certain great lady of the court who—but let that pass.

"There came a tavern-brawl and a pretty stripling went near to death by an overdose of tankard—my tankard 'twas. His father was a great noble and we players,

just then, in passing bad odor. Naught was left me but to fly. I took ship for the Americas and during the passage we fell foul of Gentlemen of the Main. Well, I joined their company, became boldest of bold blades and—now ye see me. Need know no more than that, Frank; that and —that I have come to love ye."



MY BRAIN reeled dizzily. Truly, my lines seemed cast in most unpleasant places. An a man-o'-war overhauled us, I was like to be either killed in combat or hanged most speedily without hearing. My uncle's intercession would doubtless come too late to benefit me, for drastic penalties were prescribed for all persons found aboard a pirate-craft since His Majesty's gracious proclamation of amnesty to all who would quit the trade, dated in December of 1717. And if we escaped capture——

"Once in New Providence, Frank," that sinisterly silken voice assured me, "then will we twain be wed."

"But—but, Kit!" Feebly I began to protest, my fingers going instinctively to Joyce's locket.

There came no change in the comely brown face, but into the black eyes leaped a sudden flame.

"I brook no 'buts'! Remember!" she warned me. "Ye live today only because of my protection. Bart Skyrm and that rogue, Hartley, love ye not. An' ye anger me, I care not a fig for what befalls ye."

Abruptly she was all gentleness again. One slim brown hand closed upon mine with a grip of amazing steelness.

"Ah, Frank, Frank, lad, think it strange that I should love ye? I, who have never known man's hand save in a buffet shrewdly returned? I, who have lived this half-score years without suspicion of men that I was other than themselves? Well, strange it may be, but when I crossed the *Speedwell's* bulwark and saw ye, yellow curls aflutter, blue eyes shining boldly, then something moved in here; something that had never stirred till then.

"I stood ready to strike up Tom Davie's cutlass at need, but Tom slipped and somehow ye spitted him. Then, lest some of our wild rogues do ye hurt as ye wielded that toy bodkin, I struck ye down. I—I loved ye dearly, Frank. So I brought ye aboard and outfaced that craven cutthroat, Skyrm. When we reach New Providence, then will we be wed. I will not be gainsaid. What I want, that do I take—and woe to the fool who would cross me."

Swiftly she leaned to me, and we were sheltered by the wadded jibsail from view of those about the rum-hogshead. Her *cigarro* she flung overside.

"Am I, then, so hard-favored that ye shrink from thought of wedding me? Why, I mind that once I broke a fellow-player's head when he vowed that prettier boy was never made; that I should ha' been a maid! But never have ye seen me i' petticoats. Once in New Providence, I'll deck me out in women's fripperies until ye must own that ne'er was fairer damsel come from any convent. Ah, Frank, say that ye do not shrink from me because all these years I've dodged the woman's life."

There was amazing wistfulness in the bold face now. As if she regretted the unnatural, unalterable past; desired to start afresh and tread her rightful path; as if both lit a fire in this strange creature. But tight about my neck, as if a slim hand tugged gently at the golden strand, I felt the thin chain upholding Joyce's locket.

"Buss me, Frank," whispered Kit. "Save in mummery, I have never known the touch o' lips."

Still I sat, as if smitten by a spell. With my movelessness, that devil of ungovernable temper began to flame in Kit's eyes. A slim brown hand shot over to close upon my shoulder.

"Is there a maid i' Charles Town? Body o' God! I'd slit your gullet blithely an' I believed that!"

"Nay," I hastened to mumble. "No maid waits me there. It is—is the strangeness of this your tale. Had ye been ill-favored, some strapping shrew, I would have believed this account of masking without pause. But ye are a comely lass, Kit; it seems passing strange some keen-eyed rover has not found ye out."

"The worse for him, had he guessed—a slit throat for his pay! But buss me."

Gingerly I leaned and surely no more unwilling caress ever brushed a woman's lips. But Kit seemed too much the novice to gauge the heat of kisses. A ludicrously beatific smile curved her full red lips.

"Now, devil strike me dumb and blind!" she breathed. "Always had I heard o' the magic potencies o' lip-clingings, but never believed. Now am I convinced that too little has been said on the score."

Jauntily she sprang up and faced aft.

"Must begone, Frank. Without their faithful quartermaster, none may say what

those dolts o' the crew might be about. Bart Skyrm, too, needs constant watch." Twinklingly, she looked down at me. "Lest ye should think ye ha' but dreamed a dream o' petticoated marooners, Frank, stand here and look where I bid."

After she pointed to where a slim rover in elegant—if very dirty—linen shirt and blue breeches lounged against the bulwark. As I stared Kit chuckled grimly.

"Aye! Bill Bridewell. What an' I tell ye that Bill is, like Bideford Kit, a woman? That all know her, as none know me?"

This was easier to believe, both because of Kit's voluntary unmasking and because "Bill Bridewell" was seemingly younger than myself, and my hair was no yellower, my eyes no bluer, my skin no smoother, than this handsome rover's. Too, there was a suggestion of feminine lissomeness, a swelling of the soiled shirt at the bosom, that I noted now, a telltale rounding of the figure quite lacking in Kit's boyish slimness.

"Aye, 'tis Bertha Skyrm," nodded Kit. "Bart Skyrm's lawful wife. Since by our articles none may bring a woman to sea, nor live i' wedded state aboard the sloop, Bill comes as a free rover, drawing a full share with others o' the company. At sea she lives apart from Bart Skyrm."

It may be that Kit marked a certain fixity about my gaze, for, as Bart Skyrm's wife leaned against the bulwark amid the confusion of coiled ropes and tag-ends of running-gear, she made an attractive picture—even though I knew that her vocabulary was no less lurid and extensive than Kit's or the other pirates', as her fighting abilities and bloody-mindedness were near equal to any man's. Kit's eyes flamed.

"Now, mark ye, Frank Heardman," she warned with soft ominousness. "Let me catch ye casting sheep's eyes at Bertha Skyrm or any other light o' love and ye will find yourself with well-slit throat."

HARTLEY, by this time, was not only a full-fledged member of the rogue company, but something of a leading spirit as well. Kit seemed the only one aboard the *Vengeance*, save myself, to look sourly upon the gigantic renegade. Hartley led the drinking bouts, bellowing forth the drunken chanteys with the lustiest. One-eyed Bristol Dick, the boatswain, was chosen crony of Hartley. I noted that these two began to gather about them a handful of the more influential rovers in secluded spots, for mighty secret talks. Very often Slade, the villainous-faced gunner, joined them. I marked that these conferences broke up swiftly whenever Kit came near.

In that afternoon, while still my wits were befuddled by the tale that Kit had told, the plan she had announced, I met Hartley upon the deck without observing his approach. Being fired by the prodigious quantities of rum he had swilled, he needs must jostle me violently. I was hurled a-spinning by the weight of his great body, since I have never been of a figure to achieve much by brute strength, being, as my father often laughed, of "rapier build," slender and wiry-muscled.

Out flashed Hartley's cutlass and obscenely he vowed to lop my milksop ears therewith. Having no weapon of any sort, I fell back before him, casting about for a missile. Then a firm shoulder brushed mine, shoving me aside. It was Kit, smiling gently, but with black eyes glowing almost insanely bright.

"Give me your blade, Kit!" I cried.

Without heeding me, she swung a mighty stroke at Hartley. Barely did he duck in season to save his bull-neck from that blow. But he fought back strongly, with tremendous, awkward hacks of his cutlass. The fury of Kit's attack was amazing. I began to understand how she had lived so long among these villains without any guessing her sex. Her heavy blade moved so swiftly that sometimes it seemed as if all the space between them was filled by whining, grating, glinting steel.

There came one agonized shriek from Hartley and his weapon clanged to the deck, still gripped by the severed right hand! He lurched for'ard, holding up with his left hand the spurting stump of his sword-arm, but within two paces he fell. Bristol Dick was near. The boatswain snapped out a command and a brace of gaping rovers picked up the senseless figure and bore it aft for Skyrm's surgical ministrations. Then Dick, with a half-score of angry faces at his back, began furiously to upbraid Kit.

"Ye know our articles!" roared the boatswain. "By the eighth o' them, no blow to be struck on shipboard. All quarrels to be settled wi' pistol or blade ashore, wi' a crew's officer to govern."

"Ah," smiled Kit, the black eyes burning brighter, "do ye toss in my teeth the articles? Then let me bring to your mind, dear Dick, Article the Sixteenth, whereby

the quartermaster draws power to deal punishment to minor offenders. An' ye like it not, why hang back so coyly, good Dick? Have ye not a score o' traitorous scum to your heels, apt in their rôle o' insurrectionists, brave bully? Step up, my Dick, step up like a bold rover—and kiss this!"

The cutlass point flickered within an inch of Dick's flattened nose, and hastily he shrank back. Step by step, with cowed following retreating behind him, was Dick driven before the lightning play of Kit's blade, the murderous rage in her eyes. At the fo'c'stle companion she let all pause, while daintily she mopped her forehead with fine linen kerchief. Then squarely she turned her back upon them and came aft to me.

"Why did ye not let me lesson Hartley?" I demanded sullenly, and she smiled.

"Ah, Frank, that great hulk would have murdered ye. Brave enough are ye, lad, but over-tender for coming to strokes with such as he."

The next dawn I came on deck in bad temper with all beneath the rose-flushed gray sky. During the night I had wondered if 'twould not be better to leap overboard at the first dim sight of land, to try my luck at gaining shore. I despaired of other escape from this foul and bloody pack than by swimming.

A triumphant cry, shrilling down from the masthead, where a rover clung to scan the sea, broke in upon my gloomy musings.

"Sail-ho!" roared the lookout.

Instantly the pirates swarmed up the ladder to deck, gulping down bites of biscuit and salt meat as they came. One ran aft to fetch Skyrm. By the time the captain appeared, red-eyed from his night's potations, the lookout had announced the vessel a brig, from her gait a fat, slow merchantman. The rovers raised joyful shouts at this, but their rejoicings increased when a sloop was reported as consort to the brig.

Upon deck came the already shining weapons for final polishing. Most of the pirates stripped to the belt and bound brilliant kerchiefs about their skulls. Sashes held up their breeches and cross-belts of pistols were slung over shoulder. Moodily I watched. There seemed scant doubt that, once we plundered these luckless craft, we should head for New Providence and my hateful wedding day. Kit passed me, at that moment, dapper of dress, re-knotting the brilliant kerchief about her close-cropped head.

"'Marooners' Luck,' lad! Ho for New Providence!" she called. Mentally I wished them luck, indeed, but of somberer hue than that she had meant.

We clapped on every rag of sail the sloop could compass and headed for the poor sea-sheep, the *Vengeance* making for her quarry like a famished wolf. No pretence, this day, of being other than she was; at the masthead snapped the Jolly Roger. Soon were we near enough to view the vessels clearly from our deck. The brig was a clumsy craft, heavy-laden and seemingly ill-manned. Close beside, like a child clinging to its mother's skirt, was the little sloop.

Bart Skyrm, in all the glory of his crimson damask and Spanish hat, scanned the vessels keenly through his spyglass and grinned wolfishly. I saw Bertha, his wife, cast a sneering glance upon his finery as she stroked cutlass-edge with whetstone.

The *Vengeance* bore down as they labored to put about; overhauled them within fifty yards. The handful of men about the brig's deck ran up and down like witless creatures, tossing their arms in air and crying out in doleful lament. Then up from a pile of canvas amidships leaped a man in scarlet coat. He flourished a bright sword. His voice rang out in curt commands. A row of upper ports dropped. Over the *Vengeance's* deck swept a well-laid broadside. Too late now to sheer off, even if the wheelpost were not matchwood, the foretopmast dragging its hamper overside! Our headway brought up alongside. One salvo we fired, but the gunners, unnerved, aimed high. The ball's but pierced the brig's canvas.

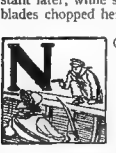
I crouched quite unashamed behind the fore-hatch. No fight of mine, this. Kit raged up and down like a fabled Amazon, gathering about her a handful of desperate rogues seemingly bent on boarding. Skyrm, farther aft, appeared palsied by this uncanny transformation of helpless merchantmen into sharp-fanged bulldogs. He shrank back toward the after-companion and those villains about him seemed infected by his fear. Then the *Vengeance* crashed fairly against the brig's side and grated along it.

Before Kit might lead her little following up to the bulwark, a swarm of brawny, buzzahing British tars leaped over it to the *Vengeance's* deck and fell fiercely upon the pirates. Skyrm and the after-guard fought half-heartedly and were swiftly forced down the ladder below decks. Bertha Skyrm I saw through a rift in the whirling

figures at the companion. Surely none would think her a woman now. She battled with amazing fury; before her leaping blade the attackers gave back for an instant. Her shrill call lifted above other sounds.

"Come up, ye damned cravens!" she shrieked with a string of lurid oaths. "Bart Skyrm! Bart Skyrm! Come up and die like a man, damn ye!"

When she had no answer from the cowards below, suddenly she thrust a pistol down the companion and fired, as if enraged by her husband's cowardice. An instant later, while still she bent so, a dozen blades chopped her down.



NOW all resistance to the tars was made by Kit and her dozen cutthroats, backed against the sloop's starboard bulwark. Outnumbered ten to one, the very thickness of the press about them was their salvation for the moment. But a few of the man-o'-war's men might come near enough to the half-circle of rovers to cross blades, and every rogue beside Kit fought like a cornered wolf. They had no hope of escape. Quick death by steel or bullet had for alternative but slow torture by hangman's noose.

Little of it all could I see clearly, for the throng was shoulder-to-shoulder in those fierce seconds. Only the bloodied blades flickering up above dark heads, the panting breath of many men, the occasional groan or shriek—these told of the struggle. So I kept to my hiding-place in shelter of the hatch, wondering how best to pass those battle-mad tars, to gain the man-o'-war officers and tell my tale.

A sudden flurry among the packed figures caught my eye. Men moved. A narrow lane opened by their withdrawal upon themselves. Through it leaped a bloody, warlike figure that cleaved ferociously to right and left with stained cutlass. Kit broke through. She came for'ard at a weary half-run before any of the king's men had wit to halt her.

Somehow, I read her fierce intent. More than once had she said to me that to fire the magazine and send freebooters and conquerors Hellward together was proper end for a bold rover. The *Vengeance's* powder, stored amidships, might be gained through the fo'c'stle. I knew that she meant to fire the magazine. Almost without thought I leaped erect and barred her way to the companion. She grinned at me, the curling of cracked lips twisting the powder-stained face into an inhuman mask.

"'Marooners' Luck,' Frank!" she croaked. "Now for a swift and fiery end for all —Brethren o' the Main and king's men alike. Execution Dock shall be cheated!"

"Nay, ye shall not!" I cried, with outflung arms halting her.

"Stand aside, Frank," she commanded.

Still she smiled setly, but into the opaque black eyes came the mad flame of that ungovernable temper. I leaped backward, but only to snatch up the cutlass some luckless rover no longer needed.

"Have I saved ye from Hartley's blade," she cried, "only to slay ye myself?"

"Stand ye back yourself," I made reply to this. "I would not have friendly blood upon me. I tell ye, Kit, rather than prove it, that two men in England, indeed, might slay me with the blade, but those twain are in England. Now, stand ye back!"

"Fool boy!" she laughed. "Never yet have I met the man might match me with the steel. Think ye that a stripling, scarce dry behind the ears, can best me?"

The cutlass was a clumsier blade than I had ever used, ill-balanced, unwieldy, no better than a bludgeon compared to the delicate hang of my lost Italian rapier. So I fell back a brace of steps before the flashing fury of Kit's attack—which was a deal more awesome to watch, than effective against a skilled swordsman. Then my head cleared and my wrist, stiffened somewhat by days of idleness, grew flexible. Over Kit's shoulder I marked the mass of the king's men, motionless for the nonce, gaping at us like spectators of some play-acting. Then in the joy of fence I forgot them.

Now I halted my retreat, gaining mastery of the heavy blade with successive thrust and counter. Began display of simple sword-play; almost losing sight, in the fascination of the practice which had been my daily stint since boyhood, of the surrounding circumstances of that odd bout. Time after time did Kit lay herself open to a death-stroke, even though I had no point but only clumsy hewing-edge.

Now were we ringed about by tense, bearded faces; pistol muzzles menaced us, and cutlasses. Yet the watching tars let us fight on unhindered. Step by step I forced Kit back upon them, with sliding blade threatening eyes, breast, sword-hand, even booted ankles. Into her wide glaring eyes, as she struggled desparately to hold her ground, there crept an odd, almost

childish bewilderment. Then came something very like to humility and I could not forbear laughing in sheer boyish delight.

"Ah, my Kit," I grinned, "ye are not the only one to unmask. Let us call this" —flashingly I sliced at her face and recovered—"the 'Play o' the Bantam turned Gamecock.' Grip that cutlass strongly, my dear. Ye are but a child at this man's work. When I am ready I shall disarm ye—I warn ye beforehand."

There was a sweet Italian trick my father had taught me, a simple feint in *prime* and swift recovery, followed by a lunge in *tierce* with an indescribable twisting of the blade that wrapped it about the opponent's and snatched it from his hands. This would I have loved to employ, but the stiff clumsiness of the tool I now wielded permitted no such delicate manœuver. I had recourse, then, to the old-fashioned disarming, which my father had schooled me in until I had mastered it—against just such need as this, it may be.

Kit used much of her remaining energy in a wild fury of blows. When she slashed viciously in *quarte* I was ready and parried with the *quarte*-parade, by a dry, smart beat with the *forte*, the part of my blade nearest the hilt, then seized the shell of Kit's cutlass-hilt with my left hand. Bringing up my left leg to the right, with the *forte* I bore strongly upon her blade. Her fingers unclenched despite herself—as will anyone's not familiar with and watchful for the trick. Drawing in my arm swiftly, I stepped back with a laugh and presented both points against her, as if I wielded the "case of rapiers."

So engrossed had I become in disarming Kit that I had forgotten for the moment all else. As Kit stood aghast, staring dumbly into my face, the surrounding tars surged in. A burly seaman clapped pistol to Kit's back and fired.

The battle was over. As Kit crumpled I marked a confusion aft, where Bart Skyrm and his fellow-cravens were being hauled on deck, speedily to became gallows'-meat. I wheeled back to the king's men about me, wondering vaguely why I had not already shared Kit's fate. My eyes fell upon a well-loved, bescarred countenance, split now by widest of wide grins.

"Tom! Tom Arnold!" I cried and the old soldier, my uncle's body-servant who had dandled me as a toddler in old Devon, grinned the wider.

"Aye, Master Frankie," he laughed. "I knew ye when first we crossed blades with this hellion. Told these Jack-tars ye needed no aid o' their to vanquish any bloody pirate. Rarely did ye lesson him i' fence, but why did ye not slay him, lad?"

"Because—why, there was reason," I made slow answer, staring down at the still figure at my feet.

"Your uncle is aboard the brig," Tom went on. "When the *Speedwell* limped in to tell of his nephew's capture, a wrathful man was the major, I tell ye. He it was cooked this surprise for the pirate with the officers o' the *Phenix* man-o'-war. We ha' cruised in that vile brig for three days, seeking ye. Best come wi' me, now, Master Frankie. The major will be mightily uneasy until he has touched ye."

I nodded, still staring moodily down at Kit. Now she moved slightly and the black eyes opened. At first they but glared blankly, then came a faint gleam as of recognition. A twisted smile curved her pale lips. One hand beckoned feebly and I knelt.

"'Marooners' Luck,' dear lad," she breathed. "First—ever I met—my master. Ah, could ha' loved ye dearly, Frank. Marked ye—finger that locket. Meant to tear it—from ye—my bridal night. Ah, well, go to—your lass. Better—far better thus."

She died.

Solemnly I crossed the arms upon her breast, marveling much at the odd turns and shifts of this our life. Joyce—well, only by the death of this strange twisted mind did I return to Joyce. One dies that others may live. Thinking thus, moved by quick pity that I have never tried to explain to myself, nor ever spoken of to Joyce, I kissed the dead lips before I rose to turn back to the brig, to my rightful life.

A brave spirit, however strange and warped, this Kit o' Bideford.

FUR PACKS

THE weight of fur packs being roughly estimated at one hundred pounds, there naturally was a large difference in the number of skins to a pack. While it took only ten buffalo robes (cow skins) to make a pack, it required nearly six hundred muskrat skins, one hundred ten to one hundred twenty fox, eighty raccoon, sixty to eighty beaver, about sixty otter, and fourteen to sixteen bear skins.—C. E. M.

THE SNARE

By KENNETH PERKINS

The Cave of the Bad Mind, the Apaches called this sinister man-trap in the heart of the desert, but to jovial Bill Caxton it was a great joke—just the sort of joke to spring on his victims

The formation of this cave has baffled several generations of prospectors. It is a natural trap which the Papagoes and Apache Indians hold in great terror. Only one explorer of the many who attempted to enter it was able to get out, and he reported finding large heaps of bones —both of animals and human beings. Since then there is no record of any attempt to survey the freak formation.

TOM DRISCOLL, who had a position in the U. S. Bureau of Mines, had a spirit that was adventurous and ambitious. When he came across that excerpt from the dead files of the U. S. Geological Survey Report his job at an office desk turned desperately dull.

He noted the date of the report: it was twenty-five years old. He went through the index of the subsequent files. He noted that the cave had a Papago name which, translated, meant, "The Snare of the Bad Mind." The Bad Mind, according to Driscoll's understanding, corresponded to our idea of the devil.

Driscoll found no more mention of the cave in the Geological Report or any other Government survey. If he had known how to read the legends of the Papagoes on their blankets and pottery and baskets he might have learned more about the cave, enough in fact of sheer blood-curdling witchcraft to dissuade most men from exploring it. But it would have taken much more to keep Tom Driscoll from making that expedition of his. He did not believe in witchcraft.

From Tucson on the Southern Pacific he went to the Toltec Spur, thence to Maricopa which was the end of the railroad. A stage took him to the southwestern terminus of the line, a little stage-stop and outfitting post surrounded by low red mesas. The little group of shacks was called Seven Mules, and it was here he got his grubstake and his outfit: a pinto, a burro, and a supply of water in two large, felt-covered canteens.

A day's journey through barrancas, across alkaline plains, over granite mesas and he was there.

According to the map which he had obtained from that U. S. Survey Report, he had to take a trail which brought him to the edge of a precipice. The cave was at the base.

Driscoll rested his two animals before the descent. As he looked down from the precipice he saw a tremendous sweep of brightly colored desert formation, streaked horizontally with stretches of mirage like narrow wavering lakes. The horizon was broken at regular intervals with red squares of mesas.

As he turned back to his animals, Driscoll received a shock. He felt that he had lost touch not only with civilization, but with the world of natural things, of reality.

He had seen lakes out there which he knew did not exist. Now he saw something else, just as weird, just as unbelievable:

It was a bald-headed, white-haired thing, something like a woman, something like a vulture—in a word, very much like those beings called harpies he had read of in books of mythology. He squinted incredulously, blinked, pulled his sombrero down to shade his eyes. No, she was not a bald-headed vulture. She was a squaw with white hair and a hook nose. Her ragged "squaw's waist" with the broad collar and the crazy quilt skirt, were in rags and thickly covered with alkali. At first Driscoll thought she might have climbed up out of a crevice, a deep black fissure in the rock, which he saw at her feet. Then he had the peculiar impression that she had been there all the time watching him. The alkali had toned down her clothes to such an extent that she seemed almost of the same color as the rock upon which she was seated.

Of course, Driscoll concluded immediately, she was a hallucination. There was no doubt about that. The sun had been too hot on that last climb up to the mesa top. He needed water, a little food, and this peculiar, silent being would merge back into the rock from which she had come. A species of mirage, or rather of sunstroke, that was all!

Driscoll drank. This particular situation demanded not only a swig of lukewarm water, but of something stronger, of snake-bite. Meeting a rattler, Driscoll argued, was scarcely more disagreeable than this encounter.

Then he heard her chuckle. It was a dry throaty sound, a succession of coughs that shook her narrow shoulders and the dusty ribbons of her squaw's waist. It was enough to make any man's hair stand on end—that is to say, under ordinary conditions. But Driscoll was rather relieved. She was just an ordinary old squaw, that was all. Crazy perhaps. But that was better than going crazy himself! Just an old, heat-crazed, blithering, wild-eyed woman dressed as any ordinary squaw in the Maricopa or Pima Indian Reservation. Probably she had wandered off and was going mad with thirst.

Driscoll unscrewed the top of his canteen, unstrapped it, and held it out as he walked toward her.

Then he received another shock.

For some reason or other Tom had been confident that the woman could not speak any language he could understand, even though he knew that most of the Indians in that locality spoke either English or Mexican. This squaw spoke not only English, but she used the customary colloquialisms of the desert muckers.

"What do I want yer water, hombre?" she snapped. "They's plenty of water two miles down that-away." Her finger, a parchment covered malformed bone, pointed across the mesa.

Driscoll stared. He was too astonished to start a conversation. Who was she? Or rather what was she? What was her business there, waiting on the ledge of a rock, with a bottomless crevice at her feet? She had lived among white people, that was clear enough, judging by her very first sentence.

"If you know where there's water two miles from here, you know more about this locality than I do," Driscoll finally said. "Perhaps you can help me."

She grunted, peering with flaming eyes from under white shaggy brows.

"What are you doin' here, hombre?" she demanded.

"You don't need to be afraid of me," Driscoll said. "I'm not an escaped criminal. I understand the desert's full of 'em. I'm just a—" He was going to say geologist, but this word, he was convinced, would be unintelligible to her. "I'm interested in rocks—making surveys."

"Thar ain't nothin' around here, hombre," the woman snapped again.

"I'm not looking for mineral deposits this time. I'm looking for bones."

The squaw's leathery forehead wrinkled. She riveted her piercing black eyes upon him. It was evidently her turn to adjudge him crazy.

"Bones?" she asked. "For why?"

"In the interests of—" He was going to explain that bones of prehistoric animals were worth as much as copper or gold deposits; that is to say, to a man of a scientific passion such as Driscoll's. But all this talk he knew would be futile. She would not understand. "I'm looking for that cave which the Papagoes call the Snare of the Bad Mind," he came directly to the point.

The woman leaped down from her rock with a strange, throat-tearing cry. He had spoken a word which had the same effect on her as certain words will have upon victims of an obsession. Yet for the life of him he could not understand what it was all about. He saw her standing there, just a few yards away on the other side of that narrow bottomless fissure in the granite.

It looked as if she intended to leap over it and throw herself upon him.

"What's the matter? What have I said? That cave is here, isn't it? I have a map. From what I judge it is directly underneath us. Perhaps that crevice at your feet——"

"It is not here! A lie! Your map is hokum—a paper of lies—a work of hell! There is no cave here! You are a hundred miles from your trail! This hole in the ground leads to the bottom of the earth! If you climb into it you'd never stop fallin' till you burned in boilin' sulphur! Git out, hombre! Git away from here. Vamose afore the devil takes possession of yer and makes yer hurl yer own carcass into that pit! That's what he's been a-doin' to me for twenty years past, tryin' his best to make me hurl meself down thar to be burned alive forever!" She spent herself with screams, with beating her flat chest, so that the dusty powder was shaken out.

Driscoll stood watching her aghast. Then the whole thing began to assume a different significance. Why should he be troubling himself there about a crazed old squaw in the desert? Why should he waste so much as a word upon an old Papago hermit-woman who, judging from her fevered eyes, was probably maddened with some cheap brew of Mexican *cuevo?*

"If you want help of any kind, a lift or a bite to eat, I'll help you out," he said quietly. "Otherwise, I guess it's time for me to vamose, just as you say."

She watched him as he turned to his horse and burro. She waited while he cinched up the pack saddle of the little jack which he loosened, as well as the saddle of his mount. Then, when he rode to the edge of the precipice where a zigzag trail led to the base, she suddenly cried out.

"Where you-all goin', hombre—you tell me!" she demanded.

Driscoll did not particularly like this. She was beginning to lose her original strangeness that had so intrigued him. To meet a lone, hook-nosed witch in the desert, sitting at the edge of a cliff, that had its touch of adventure; but to be pestered by a locoed squaw, that was not so pleasant.

Driscoll did not answer.

"You stop trailin' down thar and tell me where you-all goin'!" she screeched.

"I guess you know," he replied calmly as he rode on. "I'm going down to the——"

No, it was no use telling her that he was going to the mouth of the cave. He recalled how the mention of the Snare of the Bad Mind had thrown her literally into a fit of hysterics.

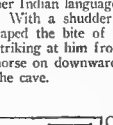
"You're goin' down to what? You're goin' where? You tell me, hombre, consarn ye! Don't you go down thar, if you-all don't want to be cursed. The Bad Mind's set his curse on that trail; every medicine man of our tribe has said it! Every herald-priest and cloud-swallower; they've warned us ag'in that trail! You come back, hombre, I tell yer!"

She had caught up with him, and, panting, shaken with passion, she caught him, digging her claws into the hide-covered cantle of his saddle. It was exactly like a bird of prey clinging to a victim with its talons.

Driscoll shook her off, spurred his mount. Horse and burro went loping down the trail in a shower of rocks and sand. Some of those rocks Driscoll found were cast at him by the maddened old witch herself. Quickly he outdistanced her, but he still heard her voice cackling out its threats and ending in a howling curse in her Indian language.

With a shudder as if he had just escaped the bite of some venomous reptile striking at him from behind, he urged his horse on downward toward the mouth of the cave.

II



TOM DRISCOLL stood there at the cave with a reluctance to enter, a reluctance that he had not foreseen. He had expected the feeling of triumph common to any pilgrim reaching his shrine. His curiosity concerning the exact of truth of that strange and legendary spot had worked him into a fervor of excitement the nearer he approached his destination. Now that he was there a fear gripped him.

His calmer nature warned that he had better study the formation of those rocks carefully before entering. He was alone. That was one danger. The persons who had seen him depart from the outfitting station at Seven Mules did not know him. If he did not return for several months, perhaps a year, no one would ask questions. Then there were those fearful stories of the desert prospectors of a generation ago who were lost in this desert and

who came to their end, according to the reports of the Indians, by wandering into this trap.

Tom dismounted, left his horse and burro in the narrow strip of shadow which the mesa cast, and then went up toward the mouth of the cave.

First he walked into a narrow barranca which had perpendicular, almost overhanging walls of limestone. Here the shadow deepened. There was no life, no evidence of water. The place was protected from the destructive elements of wind, of blowing sand, of the hot desert sun shining upon surfaces that had contracted with the night cold. The face of the mesa outside was painted in vivid greens and yellows by the rain wash, as all surfaces of these Arizona mesas, but the barranca had walls as colorless as the interior of an adobe house. For half a century, perhaps much longer, there had been little change in the rock structure.

Abruptly he came to a granite boulder the size of a barn door. He had read about this boulder in that U. S. Survey. It was one of the more or less common natural formations found in any landscape; a balanced rock.

There could certainly be no harm in shoving that rock. It did not mean that he proposed to enter. What was there to make him enter? His own curiosity, perhaps. He could destroy himself by his own will. Driscoll actually felt a shudder. That meeting with the white-haired, hook-nosed eagle up there had unnerved him.

What if he succumbed to some devilish mad whim and went in? What if something from within reached out and yanked him in? What if that rock were so constructed that it would teeter back in some freakish way, pinning him so that his only means of escape would be to go inward instead of coming out? Then again, what if there were some sort of poisonous gas, undetectable to the nostrils, which might be liberated in a gust upon opening that rock? No, this last was ridiculous. The whole business was ridiculous. He was hypersensitive, obsessed with foolish notions because of that laughable old bundle of rags, the crazy squaw!

He pressed against the boulder. It would not budge.

A crevice between the rock and the wall of the cave attracted his attention. It was large enough to admit his arm up to the shoulder, but he could feel nothing. Part of this aperture was stopped by a small rock, the size of a man's fist. Merely with the hope of letting in more light into that aperture so that he could look in, he tried to knock this little rock out. It was jammed so tightly that he had to use another rock to pound it out.

Upon accomplishing this, he struck a match and held it as far in as he could reach. It was then that he realized that the weight of his body as he leaned forward was pressing against the bowlder and making it swing slowly open!

There came the immediate and faint impression of a dank odor. In the black rift between the rock and the wall of the cave from which it had parted, there seemed to be a bottomless space, as one might feel in coming suddenly in pitch darkness to the brink of a well.

There was a clatter of stones overhead. A small rock fell, striking Driscoll on the shoulder. As he still leaned his weight against the huge bowlder other stones fell, stones of sizes varying from that of a hen's egg to one scarcely small enough to be encircled by a horseshoe.

To avoid being pelted by anything large enough to crack his head, Driscoll thought better of his situation and stepped back.

Instantly, but with a slow deliberate motion, the huge bowlder, relieved of Driscoll's weight, teetered back and settled into place.

He looked up. Why was it not possible for a man to manipulate that rock from the inside of the cave? The whole thing was like a Chinese riddle. The answer was there before his very eyes, but he could not see it then. Simple as it was, he had gone about the business in the heat of excitement, of curiosity. What he was thinking of was not the trick of that opening, but of the dangers that might be awaiting him if he went into that cave alone.

One thing was absolutely certain: if a man were unable to get the proper leverage on that marble boulder, it would be impossible to move it. Twenty men could not have moved it. Of course if one man remained outside and another went in to explore, it would perhaps be safe.

Driscoll cursed at his failure, at his inability to satisfy his curiosity immediately. He cursed even at his own common sense which prevented him from calmly walking into the cave without further deliberation. Then something prompted him to turn around. The narrow space between the walk of that barranca had darkened—not with a shadow, but with the presence of another figure partially shutting out the light.

Tom Driscoll found himself facing a man.

III

IT WAS a very pleasant young fellow with a round, sun-tanned face. Crow's-feet gave his clear brown eyes the impression of twinkling. His firm mouth was parted in a genial smile.

Surprised as Tom Driscoll was at coming thus face to face with a stranger in the desert, he did not draw his gun. There seemed to be no occasion for such a move. In the first place the man had observed a fine point of Western etiquette by leaving his gun and holster on the pommel of his saddle. His sorrel mare was a good twenty feet away.

"Who the Sam Hill are you, pard?" Driscoll asked.

"Just another mucker," the man said. His tone showed that he was certainly glad to meet another of his own kind down there in that wilderness. "Been trailin' you for a good twenty miles. My name's Bill Caxton."

"Trailin' me?" Driscoll repeated, somewhat alarmed at this word, even though the man's demeanor and expression were completely disarming. "What were you trailin' me for?"

"To be honest with you, pard, I'm hungry. I'm lost. That's the whole story. I followed the first tracks I found out there in the salt beds. Easy followin', but you sure made good time."

"You're welcome to half of everything," Driscoll offered. "Have a swig of this first."

Bill Caxton took the proffered flask and gulped a drink.

"You've saved my life!" he exclaimed exuberantly.

"Before we eat," Tom asked, "do you mind telling me this: did you happen to run into a locoed squaw up there? If you followed my trail you must have seen her."

"I reckon she hid when she saw me coming," the stranger answered. "Leastwise I didn't see her."

Tom rubbed his hand involuntarily across his forehead. He had a definite belief that he had seen a ghost, something perhaps like a mirage. He had heard of such illusions in this part of the country. But she had spoken to him! There was no mirage about that. A hallucination perhaps—which meant Tom was suffering from the desert sun more than desert mirages.

He stared at the stranger before him: perhaps he too was a ghost. But not very likely. He seemed real and natural enough. He was a well built but somewhat chunky fellow, evidently powerful. If he had been lost for long, the desert had not yet broken him by any manner of means. He was the picture of strength, youth, virility, good spirits. His hands as he picked out a cigarette paper from his book were remarkably steady, easy moving, almost graceful.

Tom passed him a tobacco bag.

"Thanks, pard." He rolled his cigarette. "Say, look here, what are you so worried about?"

"About what I saw up there. It couldn't have been human. Guess I was dreaming."

"Better take a swig yourself." He smoked with a great relish. "Doin' some assayin' up there in that barranca?" he asked pleasantly.

Tom laughed rather sheepishly. It was not easy to explain to any chance wanderer in the desert that he was a scientist and not a pocket-hunter. "I'm not exactly a prospector," he said. "I'm a geologist. But I'm looking for fame and fortune as much as you."

"A geologist? What in tarnation's that?"

"The same as a prospector, except I'm interested in all rock formations, even if they haven't lodes. When you came you caught me trying to get into a cave. Up there. They say it's filled with bones. I was just debating with myself whether it was wise for me to go horsing in there when I'm alone."

"Why not?" the other asked.

"Well, to tell you the truth," Tom laughed, "I didn't have the nerve."

"A cave's a cave," the other said. "Nothin' to be afraid of. No pumas here. No wildcats. No life of any sort."

"They say that when you get into this cave you can't get out," Tom explained. "I don't believe the legends of these Papagoes, as a general rule, but I've seen this attested to by the U. S. Survey. Then, too, being here in the desert all alone—well, the whole thing made me stop to think. I wanted someone to be here on the outside in case that rock won't swing out as easily as it swings in. I notice that just a little thing like a stone jamming up there where the boulder and the cave side meet will block the whole thing. It's like a self-

locking door. Anyway, I decided to stay out."

"You're a wise hombre, pard. But look here, if you're so all-fired anxious to find out what's in that cave, go ahead in. I'll watch here for you, if that's what you want."

Tom Driscoll looked the stranger straight between the eyes. They were deep brown eyes with a merry, almost boyish twinkle. Little lights played in their depths. For some reason, that he could not for the life of him understand, Driscoll did not like that last remark.

"Go on in I'll wait for you. I'll help you get out," the stranger repeated.

"Oh, no," Driscoll said coldly. "You won't help me out."

The twinkling eyes of the stranger narrowed. The light went out. The brown turned pale, yellowish.

"What the hell do you mean by that, hombre?"

"I guess I've got your number," Tom said. "If you had waited and let me feed you, you might have trapped me. You're good and smooth. I'd have believed anything. But it was up to me to suggest that you wait out here—not up to you. I wouldn't go into that cave for a million dollars."

"Wouldn't you?"

Tom felt a qualm hit him in the stomach. The audacity, the coolness of the man made him shudder.

"I reckon you will go in."

Tom Driscoll was dumb. His hand was taught, ready to spring for his gun.

"I'm advising you not to draw, hombre," the man calling himself Bill Caxton said quietly.

A THOUSAND thoughts whirled through Tom's mind. What had happened? He found himself looking straight into the face of a bandit, that much was a certainty. But what was the bandit's game? Probably he wanted a horse and a grubstake. That was all. In plain terms Tom was being held up, and by a bandit who preferred to go about his business without too much indiscriminate shooting. Otherwise he could easily have potted Tom in the back just a moment before.

"All right, stranger, what's your game?" Tom asked.

"I want your gun, hombre," was the calm retort.

"That's a pretty good joke, Mr. Road Agent." Tom laughed. "You come to me and ask me to my face for my gun! What do you expect me to answer to that—if not to laugh?"

"It is one of my rules not to kill a man I rob—unless my hand is forced."

"Well what's to prevent me from dropping you right where you stand?"

It was the stranger's turn to laugh.

"You'll find that out before one minute more is over," he replied. "Only then it will be too late."

As a matter of fact Tom Driscoll found out the answer in less than a minute. He found it out within ten seconds. As the renegade and he stood glaring at each other like two dogs about to spring, Tom noticed something out of the corners of his eyes. It was a twinkle. Somehow it reminded him of the twinkle in the brown eyes of Bill Caxton. But Driscoll intuitively knew what it was. It came from the mesquite brush. Even without looking directly at it, he knew that it was the sunlight catching the muzzle of a revolver.

In plain terms, Driscoll concluded to himself, if he made a move he would be hit. A few seconds only were allowed him.

"Your iron, Mr. Geologist," the gunman's voice was repeating.

If Tom surrendered he would not be shot, that seemed reasonably sure. But what chance was left? He would be without a horse, without food, without a gun in the desert. That was worse than being shot. The fight was worth it.

He whirled, but he did not draw and fire on the man standing before him. That man, Bill Caxton, was only the figurehead, at least in this situation. The real danger was there in the mesquite brush.

One move only was necessary, a lightning draw, a quick turn, a shot.

The winking point of light in the brush went out, as if it had been a candle extinguished in the wind. A Mexican sombrero emerged from the brush; a man groaned an oath, fell forward.

Bill Caxton thrust his hand into his breast for a hidden gun. Hanging his other gun on his saddle-horn was of course only a ruse. Driscoll whirled upon him. The men jammed together in a clinch, each one gripping the other's gun-hand.

Then came a flash of white light between two boulders; another man in ambush had opened fire. A sharp pain stabbed Driscoll

in the shoulder. With it he felt a heavy concussion as if someone had hurled a great weight upon his back. He knew he was hit.

His back was broadside against that hidden enemy. Clinched as Tom Driscoll was with one of the renegades, and offering his back as a defenseless target to another hidden off there among the boulders, he knew he was trapped. His gun dropped clattering to the pebbles.

"All right, hombre; I'm through," was all he could say as he began to see black.

"You're through, are you?" Bill Caxton stepped away. "Not quite yet. Damned if I knew you'd be so quick, Mr. Geologist. You started a right smart blaze. Quickest draw I ever did see."

Driscoll stood swaying, his shoulder convulsing with the wound. There was a desperate hope within him that the outlaw would not shoot him down like a dog, and there was a desperate yearning to reach down for his gun.

"Don't drop him, Chief," a pained voice came weakly from the mesquite. "Don't drop him. Shootin' is too good for that hellbender. He hit me. I'm done for. Leave him to me, Chief, I beg yer! I want to show him what a man gits for doin' this. Leave me show him."

Tom Driscoll heard the voice. It was harsh, pain-ridden, cruel.

"Leave me finish him my own way, Chief!" It came from the borderland of death.

Bill Caxton smiled. He picked up Driscoll's gun, then chuckled as if to himself.

"I'll be fair," he said. "Why shouldn't I shoot you down like a dog? You put up a rip-snortin' fight, and now you're beat. No, I won't kill you. Don't fire. Don't waste any more of your lead, Strawn," he called out to the other man, hiding behind the boulders. He then turned to his wounded henchman, who with huge Mexican sombrero tilted from his head, was stretched partly revealed in the mesquite clump. "All right, Pudge," he said to this fellow. "Being it's your last request, so to speak, I'll let the hombre live, for your sake. Do whatever you want."

Both of Bill Caxton's henchmen came from their hiding-places.

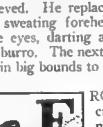
First from the direction of the boulders a lanky, leather-faced man stalking cautiously, fearfully, into the open. He looked to where Driscoll, faint from his wound, sank to his knees.

"Sure he ain't got another iron on him, Chief?" the man asked, his gloomy brown face elongating. "I don't want no more set-to's like the last one. He's a murderous customer, that hombre!"

Bill Caxton, scoffing at his lanky and nervous henchman, went over to Driscoll and examined him.

"I guess there's nothing more to be afraid of, pards," he said. "The fight's over, and now comes the chow."

The leather-faced man seemed infinitely relieved. He replaced his gun and wiped his sweating forehead. Then his bright blue eyes, darting about, caught sight of the burro. The next instant he had stalked off in big bounds to unstrap the grub pack.



FROM the mesquite crawled the wounded man.

Driscoll looked at him, and the face now ashen and drawn in pain sent a chill through him. Apparently it was the face of a halfbreed Mexican, for the cheek-bones were high and the eyes, now glazed, were slanting. He returned Driscoll's look with an expression distorted with hate. Although still possessed of strength enough to crawl from the mesquite and hang onto his six-gun, he did not shoot Driscoll. He had thought of a revenge considerably more horrible than death.

"Put him in the cave, Chief. That's my last wish. That'll be my revenge. I couldn't wish for anything better'n that. Put the hombre in the cave up there, and leave him rot!"

The leader of the trio, Bill Caxton, stood above his prisoner, as if undecided whether to shoot him like a dog at his feet. The passionate voice of the dying renegade arrested his attention. Caxton's eyes twinkled merrily.

"You wanted to see the inside of that cave, hombre," he laughed jovially. "I reckon it would be a good joke if we put you in——"

Driscoll looked up quickly.

"Hombre," he said hoarsely, "of all the fiends out of the bottom of hell——"

"You don't like it?" Bill Caxton interrupted him. "Changed your mind? A few minutes ago you wanted someone to help you in—well, here we are. We've been trailing you for twenty miles and got here just in time. We're helping you in. Go on now, hombre; lift yourself up. Shag along. The Mex over there—he's

got a little savvy. It's his idea. You hit him; now you can do as he says."

"Come on, Chief," the angular gentleman who was fumbling with the grub pack called out. "Don't waste no more time. Put another shot into him and let's eat."

"No, no, Chief, I begs yer!" the Mexican wailed, crawling toward Caxton, and choking out his words as if with his dying breath. "The cave—that's where he belongs! Leave him rot there. Give him some water and some food so's he'll keep alive long enough to go mad. That's my revenge, Chief. You gotta give me that!"

Bill Caxton nodded. It was a splendid idea. The man had put up a fight and wounded one of his henchmen. He should be punished with the worst punishment at hand. Yet, there was always the comfort of leaving an enemy dead. If you have stepped on a tarantula and know that he has crawled off into the ground somewhere, underneath your pup-tent, there is always the feeling he might come back and sting you.

"What do you say, Strawn?" Caxton asked. "Kill him or put him in the cave?"

"A bullet in the head, Chief, and then we'll enjoy our beans."

"The cave, Chief. I'm dyin'. He killed me. Put him in the cave and leave him there to chaw bones the rest of his life!"

Bill Caxton, with the air of a man enjoying a huge joke, had taken a pack of cards from his pocket and was shuffling them with adroit fingers.

"If it comes a red card," he laughed, "we'll shoot him. If it's black——"

"If it comes black throw him in there!" the wounded renegade rasped. "And food—I get a share of the grub, don't I, Chief? A third of it goes to me. Well I cain't use it. Give it to him so's he'll be in the cave that much longer. Give him my share of the food!"

Before the wound in Tom Driscoll's shoulder brought on the blackness of a fainting spell, he had a fading vision in which many details were seared indelibly on his mind. He saw the renegade whom he had shot lift his ghastly head eagerly to watch the shuffling of that dog-eared deck. He heard the cards spin together; he heard the low laughter of Bill Caxton. He saw Caxton's hand, which had from the first impressed him as abnormally steady and graceful in movement.

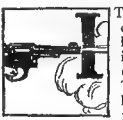
In the hand was a ragged, dirty card. Driscoll could not see what card it was, but he could see Caxton hold it toward the upturned ashen face of the dying renegade.

In the eyes of the latter there came a venomous flame, like the last flicker of a light that is about to burn out.

Tom Driscoll knew that the renegade was to get his revenge. The card was black.

"Give him my share of the grub so's he'll live long enough to go mad!" Sinking forward in pitch darkness, Tom heard those words still ringing, hissing in his ears.

IV



IT WAS of course Driscoll's impression that he had come to immediately. There was a dankness in the air. The sun's heat no longer beat upon his face, nor could he feel that hot sage-scented breath of the barranca. He caught a curious scent as of mushrooms or wet moss.

His head throbbed. There was a rhythmic pain in his shoulder. He put his hand there and found his flannel shirt and leather vest were wet.

Now he remembered; he had been hit in a gun-fight with three men.

But why was it so dark? Had the night come? If so, where were the stars? No night in the desert was as dark as this. Night-time was always a blaze of starlight or else moonlight, reflected from the glaring surfaces of white sand, of quartz, of shale, of the mesa cliffs.

Again there came that scent which was nothing like the sweet smell of sage or piñons or the invigorating smell of pepperwood. It was a musty smell. Then again it was an earthy sort of smell, associated with shadowy places where you might find ferns. Yet not so sweet as that; more like mushrooms that you have stepped on.

The hideous truth came slowly. For a while Driscoll had felt giddy, floating in the air, numb. Then the numbness began to creep over his flesh in a thousand prickly points, all centering finally in a throbbing pain. It was this pain that brought him abruptly to earth. He was no longer floating about in a black void. He knew that he had lost blood, but that was about as much as the wound mattered. He judged that he had only been creased. The bullet had cut him, but what of that? How inconsequential that seemed.

He felt in his hip pocket for the little flask of "snake-bite". The last man who

had taken a swig from that flask was the bandit, Bill Caxton. Bill Caxton had held him up; he had posted two men in ambush, one behind boulders, another in the mesquite brush. It all came back clearly now. The one behind the boulder had winged Driscoll. Driscoll himself had shot, probably killed, the other renegade, the one hiding in the mesquite. As a punishment for putting up this fight, the bandits had thrown him into the cave.

Yes, there he was, imprisoned for life in a cave which the prospectors, even the Indians, had abandoned. To the best of his knowledge no one had gone into that cave for the last quarter century!

In a sudden hysteria of horror he staggered to his feet. He stumbled on a pile of bones, and their clattering sound re-echoed loudly in the silent vault-like place. He groped outward in the darkness to support himself. He fell. His hands gripped the shanks of some skeleton. He hurled them from him as if he had picked up a reptile. He staggered, half crawling, half running, in a mad effort to find an outlet. Then he stopped, panting, weak, dizzy. What was the use of this frenzied flight in any and every direction? What he wanted was the mouth of the cave. For all he knew he might be staggering headlong to some bottomless pit.

Driscoll paused until he regained his breath. In that moment of comparative calm he thought of his matches. At least he could make a rational attempt to get his bearings.

The flare of the match as he struck it was so brilliant that it sent a pain through his eyes. For a moment he blinked helplessly. The flame burned down the match stick without a flicker. He looked about, a quick survey showing him that he was in a high vaulted tunnel of granite. One end led far off into the darkness. The other came to an abrupt end against a boulder, the size of a barn door. The vaulted roof sloped down to the top of this boulder; and the sides of the cavern narrowed so that the boulder filled the space between them. Driscoll could see plainly enough that this was the entrance to the cave.

A pile of bones was on the floor. By the light of that one match he could not tell what those bones were, but he remembered having seen horned skulls.

In the pitch darkness that followed the extinguishing of that match, Driscoll staggered back to the mouth of the cave. He pressed his weight against the boulder; he changed his position, pressing against it at every point. He grew frantic. He hurled himself against it. But he might as well have hurled himself against the granite walls of the cavern itself.

There was no sidestepping that hideous truth. Going crazy would not change it; beating himself into insensibility against that rock would not change it. The whole thing struck him with a certainty that left him dazed, numb: he was buried alive!

That first numbness gave way to a frenzied desire for action. He was like a man in a straight-jacket who grows hysterical because he has no room to move. This wild panic spent itself as Driscoll's strength was spent. He shouted, and the sound of his voice reverberated for an interminable series of echoes. Hysteria would get him nothing. That first hour was a nightmare of beating himself against the rock, of yelling at the top of his lungs, of striking matches and staggering by their light over more sand and rocks and bones in search of another means of exit, of falling to the ground in a fit of dumb horror. Then he made a decision.

"I'll fight it out one way or other," he swore to himself. "The last man that was trapped in here shot himself. That at least is one thing I can't do: they frisked me of my gun. Suicide? No; I'll fight it out!"

He had groped his way far down that tunnel. As a matter of fact he did not care much what happened to him now. If there was a pit in his path, what was the difference? His life was not worth a snap of the finger. There was no way to support life in that cave—that is, so far as he knew. He would last only a few days. If he did not kill himself, he would starve. The best, perhaps the bravest way of going about the whole business was to let Destiny play the game from then on. Tom Driscoll was through with playing.

IT WAS in this spirit that he stumbled on in the pitch darkness. He led himself along the interminable tunnel by feeling the smooth granite walls. His feet shuffled along in sand, in pebbles, in clattering bones, and then in something soft, oozy, something that seemed to cling to his feet. He dragged himself along for some distance before he realized that he was not shuffling along in sand but in mud. Then he took one

more step forward. He heard a splash, then swayed blindly as he found himself no longer on firm ground. There was the unmistakable sound of running water close to him, a smooth onward whirl, scarcely audible except in the distance where there was the splashing of a waterfall.

All these impressions came upon Driscoll as he swayed forward, spread out his feet in the ooze to support himself, fell headlong to his outstretched arms, and found himself in cold water up to the elbows.

The pain of landing on that right arm again reminded him of the crease in his shoulder. He felt a sudden onslaught of many bodily pains and desires. They succeeded, at least for a moment, in making him forget the horror in his brain. His shoulder pained; his head throbbed; the sound of running water reminded him that his throat was parched.

He succeeded in lifting himself from the water; then, stepping back from the ooze, he attempted to strike a match. His dripping arms destroyed the first two or three matches. His supply was getting low, but what was the difference? If he did not care for his life, what did he care for a box of matches? Finally one of them lit, sputtered, then caught the wood.

He found himself at the brink of a creek. The water was as clear as air, revealing a shoal of perhaps a few feet in depth leading to the other side. Beyond was a limitless expanse of shadows which wagged slightly, dwindled, disappeared.

At least he would not die of thirst. And in that underground river there might be life of some sort, perhaps fish or frogs. Yes, there was a chance that a man could sustain life.

Driscoll shuddered. The malignant rasping words of that man he had shot, reechoed in his ears: "Give him my share of the food!"

Water and food only meant that this nightmare of being buried alive would last the longer!

Driscoll went back to firm ground and fell to the sand. Again his bodily pains were completely effaced, forgotten. He did not realize that he had even forgotten to soothe his feverish mouth with water.

He could not remain there long in that vast blackness in the bowels of the earth; no man could. The stagnant, cool, musty air pressed upon him, like the horrifying pressure a man feels when he is in the throes of a nightmare. Driscoll did the natural thing: he fled toward the outside world. If die he must, at least he would die there at the gateway of the cavern, within almost an arm's reach of life.

Hours passed. As if he had wandered for ages in the depths of hell, he found himself at last where he had started from, at the boulder.

A peculiar sound struck in upon his ears. He thought he had heard it before. He thought he had been hearing it for a long time, which perhaps was the truth. On the other side of that boulder someone was laughing, someone out there in the world of the living.

It was a low cracked laugh, the laugh of a woman, and of a very old woman.

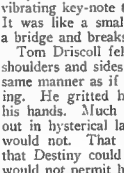
Then he remembered. He recalled that strange and hideous picture of a witch with the hooked nose and the tufts of white hair, like the feathers of a vulture.

She was there on the other side of the boulder actually laughing at him. He heard some of her scoffing words. Her threats had been fulfilled. Her prophecy had come true. This was his punishment for not taking her warning.

The laugh was low, in fact scarcely audible, as if it came from a great distance. Nevertheless it seemed to shake the very air in the pitch darkness where Tom Driscoll lay in the cave. It vibrated, shaking every nerve in his body. It was like a vibrating key-note that shakes a taut wire. It was like a small vibration that shakes a bridge and breaks it down.

Tom Driscoll felt it. He felt as if his shoulders and sides were convulsing in the same manner as if he himself were laughing. He gritted his teeth. He clenched his hands. Much as he wanted to break out in hysterical laughter, he resolved he would not. That was one trick at least that Destiny could not play on him. He would not permit himself to go mad. He was going to fight!

V



ON HIS little sorrel mare, Bill Caxton, an alert and well-formed figure, was jogging along. He had just finished a good meal; he had enjoyed a good joke, and now he was enjoying some very good tobacco. His round face was lit with a smile of perfect satisfaction with the world and with himself. The desert air, which is so torturing to a man who is hungry and thirsty, is invigorating to one who is refreshed.

By Caxton's side rode old Strawn, a lanky scarecrow of a man jolting along on a hard-riding, piebald bronc, and leading two riderless horses by the bridles.

"He sure put up a fight, that hombre," Caxton was saying. "A wonderful fight for a man who knew he was caught good and proper. Zowie! I thought I was done for. Never saw a quicker draw in my life. He plugged the Mex right in the middle of the chest too; did you get that? Right plumb square where he aimed for. If he had wobbled a half an inch to the right with that iron of his, the Mex would have dropped with the lead in his heart. Let's see, the Mex must have taken about fifteen minutes to die——"

"Killed himself chokin' and blubberin' in his own fury," was Strawn's comment. "That's the way with a Mex. You cain't beat 'em in a good fair scrap without they tear 'emselves to pieces howlin' for revenge. Serves him right."

The vision of the Mexican gasping out his last breath in his desire to get his revenge brought a chuckle from the "good-natured" Bill Caxton.

"He sure did have a sense of humor, that Mex!" he laughed. "Actually wanted us to throw his share of the food into the cave so's that poor kook would live longer—and suffer!" His chuckle broke to a hearty laugh.

Strawn was considerably less jovial. His thin, lugubrious face showed no sign of humor.

"You would have give' him the food, too," he muttered reproachfully, "if I hadn't stopped you. Here we was starvin' for a good meal, and the nearest town a good day's ride off; and yet for the sake of a joke you'd give up all you owned."

That was not very far from the truth.

"The funniest part of it all," the jovial Bill Caxton laughed, "was that the hombre we threw into the cave came down here all this way into the desert to go in anyway! I couldn't resist that part of it."

"Still and all, Chief, I'm thinkin' we might have made a terrible mistake."

"Now what the hell, Strawn!" Caxton turned his round red face upon his henchman.

"What if that thar hombre got out?"

"No one ever got out of that cave except once when a posse went there in search of a man. They found him dead by his own hand!"

"Still and all——"

"Look here, Strawn. You can't enjoy a joke when you see one. That hombre's in there for life. Do you know what that means? It means he'll last about three days; the first thing that'll happen to him is that he'll go loco. I'll allow him twenty-four hours for that. Twenty-four hours in there is the same as twenty-four years. At best I'll allow him thirty-six hours. No man can keep sane. I was thrown into a cave once myself, a little one underground, with some Papago desperadoes keepin' watch. I thought I'd been in there for a good part of my life. No night and day. No time. Nothing but pitch darkness and some water and Indian meal cakes. When I got out, I found I'd been in less than a week. Now take this cave: if any man happens to open it up within a day or two they'll find a maniac. If they open it after a day or two, they'll find a dead man—most likely a man that's killed himself. That's the whole story. Now forget it." Bill Caxton changed the subject. "Let's get down to business and think of where we'll get our next meal."

"I suppose you want to find another prospector and play another one of your practical jokes—eh, Chief? Well, count me out. Money and food is all right, but a joke's a joke!"

Again Bill Caxton looked over to his morose henchman and slowly a smile came over his face. It was a different sort of smile. Strawn caught the twinkle in his eyes.

"Yep, Chief," he muttered, "I see it comin'. You're thinkin' up another prank?"

"I am, and you're the one that put it in my mind," Bill Caxton said. "Let's play the same joke all over again—on someone else!"

"Holy cripes—now what?" Strawn exclaimed.

"Only this time, we'll get someone who's worth something to us. Here we are two able-bodied men, trailin' around in this blisterin' desert without earning a cent. Wastin' our time holding up stray muckers and not getting anything but a square meal and a little jackass brandy, and maybe a horse like this one. What we ought to do is to get something big. Something that'll make us sit easy for a good long while——"

"Don't seem to be nothin' funny about that," Strawn said. "Go ahead; what's your game?"

"In plain terms, kidnap somebody for ransom."

"Kidnap who?"

"The easiest way would be to kidnap a woman. Because they can't fight."

Strawn jolted along, his thin leathery face rigid in a sceptical frown.

"I knew there was a joke to it somewhere," he mumbled. "You kidnap a woman, and you'll have the whole State after you."

"That's just what we want. If the woman's worth enough to get the whole State excited, then it means we'll get that much more ransom."

"How much?" Strawn asked. His spidery hands began to finger the reins of his horse nervously.

"Let's make it ten thousand dollars."

"Who's goin' to give ten thousand dollars for a woman!" Strawn cried disgustedly.

"I know a rancher up to the northeast, the owner of the Box-J Outfit. His whole gang, including himself, is up in the mountains rounding up his cattle. A Hopi puncher who got canned for being drunk told me this at a saloon up there in Seven Mules."

"All right, Chief, go on. Sounds good so far."

"If we work it right, like the way we hold up these here desert wanderers, there's no reason why we can't get into the ranch. We'll most likely find a few old stable mozos and the women-folk. They won't put up any fight. The rancher's gal is a young one without much savvy."

"You sure do like to play jokes on people, Chief."

"And between the two of us we oughtn't to find it hard to bring the girl here and hide her in that there cave——"

"How about that thar little point of the ten thousand dollars?" Strawn asked.

"That may be a little harder. In fact gettin' the girl will be easier, in my mind, than gettin' the money."

"When it comes to ten thousand dollars, Chief, you'll find that folks don't generally have no sense of humor whatsomever."

Bill Caxton thought for a few moments. He was not in the habit of handling ransom money. His game was to find a lone prospector, stick him up, jolly him along a bit, take whatever gold-dust or money he had, rustle his horse and leave him to the whims of the desert. This business of getting a woman and then bartering with the civilized world for pay was a different matter.

"When we leave the Box-J ranch in company with the young lady in question," he finally announced, "I'll post a sign on the door which will read something like this: 'Ladies and gents. This is all a practical joke. No harm done, no ill feelings. The girl of the Box-J rancho has just gone to a week-end party. All in fun. But before you can fully appreciate the point of this little joke, it will be necessary for a man riding a jackass to come to the top of the lone mesa twenty miles south of the Sierra Luis Obispo. It'll cost him ten thousand dollars to see the point: which will be the return of the young lady to her beloved family and friends.'"

"Why do you choose that there lone mesa, Chief?" Strawn asked perplexedly.

"For the simple reason that from that point you can see the floor of the desert for twenty miles around. If these cowmen think they can play a trick on us and capture us, getting the girl without handing over the money, we can see 'em coming."

Strawn nodded. The point seemed to be well taken.

"And why do you want him to come on a jackass?"

"Just a little humorous touch," Bill Caxton said, his eyes twinkling. "If he came on a fast bronco, he might take it into his head to trail us. We'll be on horses ourselves, which makes the game safe all around."

Strawn's stupid eyes began to glow with understanding.

"Damme, Chief," he cried suddenly, "you sure have a sense of humor. Come on, let's go get her!"

VI

TO TOM DRISCOLL, buried alive in the earth, time went without measure. He had put up a brave fight, and he had now made up his mind to keep cool. If starvation were to overtake him, let it come. He would accept everything calmly. He would not succumb to madness if he possibly could help it.

Once he had heard of how a man, imprisoned for many years in solitary confinement and in darkness, had saved himself from insanity by keeping busy at a certain task. His captors had stripped him of all objects on his person, except, through an oversight, of two pins. These pins he had cast out into his cell in the pitch darkness. He searched for them, found them, cast them forth again.

Driscoll had plenty to do. He had his

wound to attend to. This he washed and bandaged with strips of his shirt. Slight as the crease was, he occupied his attention with it. In his clothes he had little; there were his matches, his tobacco pouch, a pipe; some raisins—which he had taken along on the advice of desert prospectors who claimed that a man can live on a few for days.

Tom Driscoll did not want to die. No matter how dreadful his fate seemed, how utterly black, hopeless, horrible it all was, he still wanted to live.

He had no way of knowing how long it was before he made up his mind to explore that cave, but when the desperate desire to live took hold of him, he began to hope against hope; there might be some other way of getting out of that cave. Perhaps he could make some sort of tool with those bones and dig his way out. Perhaps there were passages up there in the remote darkness where the tunnel opened to a seemingly boundless cavern. He might carve steps up the walls. He might follow that stream. At any rate, in exploring the cavern there was at least a possibility that he might find a means of sustaining his life.

He crossed the creek, wading almost up to his waist in icy water. He followed it along the oozy shore for a distance of perhaps fifty yards, when he came to a rock that seemed to overhang the water. There he decided to use one more of his precious matches.

That little match flame was as good as a brilliant arc light to his dilated eyes. In the brief span of its burning, he cast his eyes all about him, taking in every detail with a clearness of perception that seared them deeply in his brain.

The cavern had narrowed here, its smooth granite walls sloping, funneling down to the surface of the creek. The water moved along like a transparent substance as clear as the air itself. The bottom of the creek was carpeted with round white pebbles. The mud of the bottom seemed frozen in long parallel waves, like miniature sand dunes in a desert. The water moved on, swiftly but without ripples, into another cavern which could be approached by crawling along the shore of the creek into a little tunnel.

It was while looking along this muddy shore that Driscoll saw something so startling that he dropped the flaming match. The flame went out before reaching the ground, leaving him again in a vastness of velvet shadow.

It was most assuredly a ghastly trick of destiny that, at the very time when Tom Driscoll again felt the terrific yearning of any normal living thing to save his own life, he should come across an indication of the most imminent danger.

He had seen there in the mud on the edge of the creek—the print of a large, flat, misshapen foot!

As he stood, imprisoned in that jet-black darkness, a thousand conjectures, fears, horrors gripped him. Even though the light had gone out, he still saw everything in his mind's eye with an abnormal clarity. The water still moved on; he heard it, felt it, and, in a manner of speaking, saw it. He felt the granite walls overhanging him; he smelled the musty, dank atmosphere. He was like a blind man whose every sense worked together, making a picture—a picture as clearly seen as if by the sense of sight itself. In the center of that picture was a curious, misshapen footprint.

It was distorted, he remembered that. The toes were parted, not adjacent to each other as in the feet of men who wear shoes. There was absolutely no instep. Driscoll evoked the picture of some low form of half-human prehistoric beast. Could it be possible that some such thing inhabited that cave? Was this the answer to the riddle, the explanation of the horror in which the Indians held the place? Perhaps this was the real reason why no man could come out of that cave. Some monster lurked there to catch them and feed upon them!

No; the whole conception was too unbelievable. He was in Arizona, not in a land of fairy tales. He must have been mistaken regarding the distortion of that footprint. His excitement at seeing it had affected his vision; he had most assuredly made it seem more distorted, more horrible than it really was. Or perhaps it was a dream.

He stood there for only a brief moment of dumbfounded inactivity before he lit another match.

He was not mistaken. The print was there!

Perhaps because of the instinct of self-preservation, his mind jumped wildly to one conclusion, one hope: it was a print left intact by some prehistoric animal, a Neanderthal man of many ages past. The probable fact that no life had disturbed this part of the cavern might account for the footprint remaining unchanged. But this was ridiculous—even a slight rise or

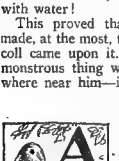
fall in that water from season to season would change the contours of that mud bank.

Again he fumbled for a match. He had only two left, but he could not resist the temptation to give that footprint one more examination.

That third match answered at least one question: the footprint was not a relic of prehistoric times. For, in the short moment between Driscoll's first examination of it and the last, the impression had filled with water!

This proved that the mark had been made, at the most, ten seconds before Driscoll came upon it. In other words, that monstrous thing was lurking there somewhere near him—in the dark!

VII



A FLEDGLING sparrow in a nest, watching some unknown and hideous terror crawling toward it along the branch; that was Tom Driscoll waiting there in the dark. He was like a bird unable to fly, unable to understand just what that thing was, that thing with the gaping jaws, the glistening fangs, the forked tongue, the green gliding body. Like the bird, bereft of all power to move, he was certain of one thing only: that death was imminent.

It is rarely that any man has to face the fear that confronted Tom Driscoll. Except in a nightmare one is never put in a position where one thinks one may be swallowed alive. Perhaps certain subconscious fears inherited from our tree men ancestors might come in a dream, as, for instance, the fear of a boa constrictor coming silently in the dead of night.

This was the sort of primal fear that Driscoll had to face. If he had known what it was hovering there in the dark, biding its time—if he could only have seen it—the situation would have been easier to face. But he had no means of knowing from which direction it would come. The darkness was everywhere, behind him, in front of him, above, below.

Not daring now to make a sound, not daring even to breathe, he stood there. His heart thumped loudly, that was the only sound.

No, it was not the only sound. Although he himself had held his breath, he heard a rhythmic breathing. It was heavy, stertorous, sniffling, as the breathing of a sickly ape, or any such animal with an undeveloped nose.

It seemed close. The thing must have crept upon him.

Driscoll clutched his match-box. There was that last match so precious but a moment before. He had sworn to himself that he would never strike that last match; now he would have given his very soul to be able to burn it!

But he was not granted the time. That breathing was louder. It seemed to be not an arm's length away. Indeed, he could feel—or at last he imagined he could feel—a dank exhalation upon his face. His wet forehead went cold.

That thing must have been facing him, standing there, not a yard away. Driscoll did not light his match. Instead, with right fist doubled like a solid mallet head of iron, he swung an uppercut into the dark.

He heard the impact, as if he had struck the head of a beef, not in the forehead, but on the pudgy lips. He had the feeling as if his fist had crashed into soft damp flesh. There was a heavy thud on the ground, a splash of water and mud, a groan.

On the instant of striking that blow, Tom Driscoll leaped back. His leap was like the recoil of a disappearing gun. Almost as if in the same gesture, he whirled about on his heels, lunged on in the dark along the creek side, splashed across it, and staggered into the tunnel toward the mouth of the cave.

IN THE outside world, the world of the living, a drama was being enacted, the climax of which was to bear directly upon the fate of Tom Driscoll himself.

Three riders had come to the mouth of the cave. The first was a happy, buoyant fellow whistling a merry tune, his brown eyes twinkling, his red jovial face lighted with a smile. This was the attitude of Bill Caxton while engaged in a pastime for which, if he were ever caught, he would hang.

The second rider was a lanky, hard-riding scarecrow of a man whose long leathery face was furrowed with apprehension. Every cactus seemed like a man waiting in ambush to his haunted mind; every dry sycamore or pinion up in the mesa canyons made his neck ache in anticipation of the rope.

With them was a third rider, an ex-

hausted, bedraggled girl. Her shoulders, thickly covered with alkali dust, swung in agile harmony with the movement of her horse, even though her hands were bound by a riata to the pommel of her saddle. Her face was worn and pale, but her eyes were aflame with excitement, the excitement of adventure. Not a detail of the landscape was missed by those vivacious, brilliant eyes. It seemed that every purple mesa, every vista of that wide sweep of desert horizon, every cactus flower, gave her a thrill. Her position could not be serious—that seemed to be her attitude. Her father was a cattle king. He would give any ransom asked. Then an exciting episode of her life would be over.

This was how Bill Caxton and his partner returned from their raid on the Box-J Ranch. A simple little call—both of them masked; a group of terrified ranch hands, most of them women, and a few breeds; a cool announcement that nobody in the outfit would be harmed if the girl would come quietly with them; no one offering resistance, except the girl herself, who was quickly disarmed—that was the whole story.

Approaching the cave after their long ride, Bill Caxton dismounted and helped the exhausted girl down from her saddle. It was of course no longer necessary to keep her bound. The frightened and lugubrious Strawn was ordered to unstrap the food-pack.

"Before we go on with the business of the day," Caxton said, "looks like a little grub won't do us any harm."

"I ain't over-particular about havin' this gal out in the open, Chief," the hungry looking Strawn rejoined doubtfully. "We better get rid of her good and pronto. No tellin' what'll happen—and if we ever git caught—blooey!"

"We'll ask her opinion on the subject." Caxton turned to the girl and asked ceremoniously. "Will you join us in an afternoon siesta, lady?"

The girl set her lips and cast the outlaw a look of withering contempt. As yet he had not been able to tease her into joining him in his pleasant conversation.

"The lady refuses to commit herself," he said. "Do you prefer to go in this cave then?"

She paled. Far back in her childhood an Indian nurse had told her strange stories of a cave down here in the desert. She was about to cry out, to beg for mercy, but to what avail?

"The lady still refuses to answer," Caxton commented.

"Better hurry up, Chief. The quicker we shag out'n here, the better. We got to be attendin' to that thar ransom. No use palaverin' with her. She's sot on keepin' tongue-tied."

"A very wise little lady," Bill Caxton said. "I hate to hurt her feelings. Be polite to 'em at all times—that's my rule. Treat 'em right. Now then, Strawn, you see that she gets a good food-pack there. Give her plenty of biscuits, canned soup and beans. We want her to be comfortable in there."

Strawn went up to the boulder with his duffle bag. He was about to knock out the little rock against which the boulder was jammed, when he turned around.

"Say, look here, Chief; don't you figure we better do this thing quick, once we get started?" he asked. "What if that hombre in there is still alive?"

The girl looked up quickly.

"What hombre?" she gasped out, as if by an irresistible impulse.

Bill Caxton laughed.

"Ah, now she speaks. The lady deigns to speak. You didn't think for a moment that we were going to put you in that cavern alone, you a poor little defenseless child?" he explained, using a gracious and pleasant tone. "Oh, no; I have some respect for the finer feelings of womenkind."

The apprehensive old Strawn, eager to have the whole business accomplished, interrupted.

"We throwed a hombre in thar a little while ago, bein' he killed one of our gang," he explained more directly.

"If you don't believe it," Bill Caxton said with a twinkle, "look over there in the mesquite. You can see a sombrero anyway. That's our partner. Only he's dead."

"And it's my opinion the man we throwed in the cave is dead, too," said the pessimistic Strawn.

"Now don't make it too disagreeable for her!" Caxton warned.

"You said yourself, Chief, he'd kill hisself afore twenty-four hours was up."

"True enough, except I suggested that if he was a brave man, he'd stick it out for thirty-six hours. If he was the bravest man in the world, he might—well, he might still be alive. It's my opinion, judging from the way he bucked us, that he's the bravest man in the world without any doubt."

Bill Caxton must have had a peculiar

knowledge of psychology. For what he had said seemed to reassure his prisoner tremendously. At any rate, she no longer remained as if stunned by her calamity.

"I suppose you know that you'll both hang," she turned upon her two captors. "I can't frighten you, that's certain. You're too hardened for that. You have no feelings. You can't picture what's happening back there at the Box-J, or what will happen when my father and the rest find out about this. Oh, yes—you'll get your money, but you'll be caught. Someone will catch you even if you go to the ends of the earth. There's not one chance in a hundred that you'll get away with this."

Her threat had a very palpable effect on the long-faced Strawn.

"It's my opinion, Chief, we should orter shove her in here and shag off to Mexico without tryin' to git the ransom," he advised.

"Strawn, I'm surprised at you! And as for you, ma'am, all I can say to you is this, as a gent to a lady: Don't be silly. Go in there and give our friend my best regards."

"That's it!" Strawn said excitedly. "No more palaverin' now, gal. Here's your grub. I'll throw it in after you. In you go!"

The tall, raw-boned renegade leaned against the boulder, after knocking out the little stone.

"Go on in. No waitin' out here. That hombre's liable to come bustin' out, and if he does I don't want to meet him—even though I got a gun in my hand. Go on!" He grabbed the girl's arms.

She could make no resistance against his vise-like grip.

"Careful there now, Strawn," Caxton cautioned. "Don't shove a lady like that. Lady, allow me."

Again the girl straightened her slender, sloping shoulders. Her eyes blazed with hate and contempt. Bill Caxton, if he had had an eye for feminine beauty, which he had not, might have been thrilled by that picture. He paused a moment. Old Strawn backed away, his leather face wrinkling to an expression of actual fear.

"Allow me to assist you into your new domicile, lady!" Caxton was saying with taunting gallantry.

It was at this point that the girl broke. The full horror of the cave swept down upon her. Her lips which had been set tightly, her eyes which had been focused with burning scorn upon her persecutors, in fact the whole expression of her face trembled suddenly to one of piteous terror.

"No, no! I can't!" she screamed. "I can't! It's too horrible. You said a man would kill himself. Then think of me—a woman! I can't bear it; I'll go mad! How can you dare to do this terrible thing? Are you afraid of nothing—not even of God Himself!"

Strawn weakened. This business of banditry was all right when you deal with men, but here was a woman. Caxton was going too far. A terrible retribution would come sometime, somehow.

"Chief," he said wretchedly, "we-all cain't do this. At least give her a gun."

"Yes, yes!" the girl pleaded. "Give me a gun!"

"What for?" Caxton asked. "There's nothing in there to shoot."

"There is myself. At least I can shoot myself. How can I stand it? I'll go mad! Give me a gun, I beg you, so I can protect myself from that——"

"Nonsense, lady!" laughed Bill Caxton, still completely unmoved. "Here, this is what I'll give you." He handed her his flask. "Drink and be merry."

"I cain't go on with it, Chief." Strawn again raised a trembling and pleading voice. "Let's leave her ride home. As for me, I want to shag off to Mexico afore we git the hell that's comin' to us."

A pelting of stones came down as Bill Caxton leaned his weight against the boulder. It teetered open.

"Drink and be merry," he laughed jovially. "Take life as a huge joke. You'll live longer. That's the philosophy for you, my child. Now allow me to assist you in."

The girl broke away. The flask which had been thrust into her hands was thrown violently at Caxton's feet, where it broke and splashed.

Caxton flushed red, then laughed as if to cover an embarrassment. Then, as if helping a fine lady into her carriage, he thrust the girl gently into the dark aperture.

The rock swung back into position with a thud. The ground shook. Through the little opening between the huge boulder and the side of the cave, there came the remotely distant sound of a woman's scream.

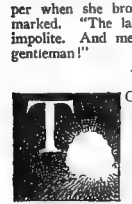
Strawn muttered oaths; his face was ashen.

"We're goin' to pay, Chief, if I know anything," he chattered.

Bill Caxton chuckled and adjusted his wampum tie.

"Damned if I didn't almost lose my temper when she broke that flask," he remarked. "The lady sure was powerful impolite. And me acting like a perfect gentleman!"

VIII



OM DRISCOLL saw the tunnel down which he was running flooded precipitously with light. It was while he was engaged in that phenomenal sprint after his fracas with his unknown adversary in the dark.

Naturally enough he had headed for the mouth of the cave, even though he had no reason to suppose he could get out. At least he could get as near as possible to the outside world before he met his death. That was the instinctive thing to do. Most of the animals and human beings that had died in that cave had dragged themselves to the mouth in one last feverish hope of escaping; the bones piled up in that tunnel near the opening testified to this fact.

Driscoll was astounded by that almost blinding influx of light. The rock had actually opened; there was no doubt about that. The reflection of the sunlight on the quartz and silt in the desert outside had flooded the narrow tunnel so that to Driscoll's eyes, dilated so long by the pitch dark, the glare was like a sustained flash of sheet lightning. He saw the black silhouettes of figures at the end of the long tunnel. They were astonishingly small, as if he were looking through the wrong end of a telescope.

He quickened his pace, covering the few intervening yards in a series of leaps. What had happened he could not for the life of him guess, but the sensation was precisely as if he were suddenly and violently awakened from a horrifying dream.

In a frenzy of amazement and joy he reached the rock just as it swung back into place with a reverberating thud. Driscoll smashed up against it, partly on the hard granite, partly upon a frail living thing—a mass of silken hair, a soft face.

It was then that the girl screamed. It was that scream which the debonair bandit, Bill Caxton, and his fear-smitten henchman, Strawn, heard just after the girl had been thrust into her prison.

The next moment Tom Driscoll found himself standing there with an inert body in his arms, the head hanging limp across his shoulder. Astounded as he was at the rapidity with which all this had happened, he at last realized a small part of the truth: the rock had been shoved open; there had been more than one figure there, unless his eyes had played him a trick; someone had come in; the rock had settled back; Driscoll himself in his frenzy to get out had banged with all his force against this frail body; and one thing more—this new victim of the cave was a woman!

He laid her gently down upon the ground. With his own sleeve, which was wet from the creek he had just splashed through, he bathed her forehead. She came to, moaned, breathed in excited sobs.

Driscoll was afraid to speak at first for fear he would throw her into another fit of hysterics.

"Don't be afraid," he finally said in a soft, gentle voice. "Do you understand? Don't be afraid of anything. I'm here. Everything's going to be all right. Don't be afraid of me."

She struggled, sprang up; he could hear her throw herself back against the rock.

"You aren't afraid of me," he repeated again, as gently as he could. "I am a prisoner here, that's all. I'll protect you. At least you can understand that. You aren't alone; I'm with you."

He waited. She did not move at this. He tried to imagine how he must have terrified her.

"You see," he went on, "I thought I could get out, when I saw that light coming in here. The boulder was shoved open. I tried to yell, but I couldn't. It meant so much to me that my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. Thought I could get here in time, but the rock rolled back again. That was why I came charging out of the dark and banged right into you. Must have frightened you out of your wits. There now, are you all right? Do you understand?"

Gentle and reassuring as his voice was, it could not possibly have calmed the girl if it had not been for one thing: the fortunate circumstance that those outlaws had told her she would find another prisoner in the cave!

"I know now," she answered him tremblingly and in a voice shaking with hysterical sobs. "They told me you were here."

"*They* told you?" Driscoll repeated in bewilderment. "What can you mean by that? Look here, what has happened? How did you come here? I thought I saw more than one at the mouth of the

cave. They'll open it, won't they? You aren't——"

"I am a prisoner—of bandits," the girl replied. She became calm as she told him what had happened. "The same two who put you in here, a man with a round grinning face, and another long ugly man with thick yellowish wrinkled skin——"

"Yes, a grinning fiend calling himself Bill Caxton and his henchman, they caught me," Tom explained. "There were three of them at first. They trailed me when I was coming from Seven Mules. Outside there at the mouth of this cave they caught me. Wanted my food pack and horse. I fought them, killed one of 'em. The other two stuck me in here to die——"

"They told me you fought them," the girl interrupted. "They told me you were brave. They said that if you were the bravest man in the world you would still be alive. I can't tell you what that meant to me. I was to be put in this dreadful place as their prisoner, while they went for ransom. I knew that if they put me in here alone I would go mad. It is all right now; I am feeling better. There is nothing more to fear." She groped out in the dark and felt for his hands. "There is nothing to fear with you here. I knew that when they first told me—even though I did not know who you were. I do not know now. But when you spoke to me, a few minutes ago, I could tell by your voice. There is nothing to fear."

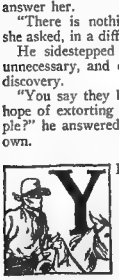
Tom Driscoll did not answer this. Abruptly his thoughts went back to that dreadful combat in the dark with that pudgy horrible thing on the brink of the creek.

The girl must have expected him to answer her.

"There is nothing to fear—is there?" she asked, in a different tone.

He sidestepped this question. It was unnecessary, and cruel, to tell her of his discovery.

"You say they brought you here in the hope of extorting ransom from your people?" he answered with a question of his own.



YES. They came to the ranch at night. My father was away with most of the ranch-hands. They were up in the mountains rounding up the cattle. A man came riding into the ranch with a bandanna tied across his face. All I could see were his brown eyes. They were wrinkled almost as if he were smiling when he talked."

"That was the fellow who calls himself Bill Caxton," Tom said. "He's the leader."

"We were down by the calf sheds," the girl went on. "Everyone was too frightened to move; there were only the ranch women and some old mozos. The man said he'd burn down the place and kill everyone unless I rode off with him. I happened to have my holster and gun on because I had been practising sharpshooting for the rodeo we're going to have when my dad gets back with the herd. The masked man laughed and held up his hands. I thought I had him. Then the women screamed and another masked man, a tall ugly beast, leaped from behind the shed, came up behind me and pinned my arms down. The women fled in every direction. I was the only one that was armed. They came out later and so did the old stable men with sawed-off shotguns. By that time my hands had been bound and I was lifted to a horse. The two men rode, one on each side, and we went up into the foothills."

"Then how about the ransom?" Driscoll asked. "Where do they expect to get that?"

"That part I don't know; I've told you everything. They said they were going to put me in here until the ransom came. There's no doubt about their getting it. My father will pay any sum they ask. That's why I am not afraid any more. When they get the money and free me, then I will see that you are saved."

Tom Driscoll was silent in thought for a few moments.

"I wonder how long it will take for them to get that ransom," he speculated at last.

"What difference does that make?" The girl was puzzled at this question. "It surely won't be very long. While we wait we can live on this food they gave me. Let's eat now. I'm desperately hungry, now that all the excitement is over."

"Did they give you matches?" Tom asked, still obsessed with that lurking horror back there in the cavern.

"I suppose you want to see what I look like," the girl laughed. Her tone showed that all thought of danger had passed. In finding herself imprisoned with this unfortunate but courageous young man, she began to look upon her plight as a thrilling adventure. "I have no matches," she said. "They didn't foresee that need, I'm afraid.

I want to see what you look like, too. But that will come later."

"Of course they took away your firearms, if you had any——"

"Yes—luckily. Otherwise I'm afraid I would have fired at you when you bumped into me. Just why do we need a revolver now?" she added, observing that he made no response.

"No reason. Forget that I asked you."

He heard her fumbling in the duffle bag among the provisions.

"It'll be a cold supper," she said. "What will you have? You can have a can of something or other, but you will have to take a chance. Of course you have no water?"

"Plenty of water," Driscoll said.

"Where?"

He made no move at that moment. Her innocence as she chatted almost in a tone of gaiety was shocking to him; it accentuated the fear that was ever present in his mind. There she was like a little child enjoying this adventure, while Tom Driscoll was wondering just when that horrible unknown thing back there in the cavern would come to attack them. Yet he was firmly resolved not to disillusion the girl. She could go on, enjoying it all.

"Oh, yes—the water—" he came to himself.

"What were you thinking about?" she asked.

"Nothing. There is plenty of water as I said. There's a creek——"

"An underground creek!" she cried out in joy. "Then we're fixed for a good long time. How much food there is I don't know, but we can make it last. It's water that I wanted above everything; my mouth is simply torturing me. Then, when my father comes, our troubles are over. Where is the creek?"

"No, no, you can't go," he answered quickly. "It's dangerous back there. I have explored the place. Terribly dangerous. You see, there's a—wall, there's a sort of crevice which you might fall into. I had matches then, but now I must grope my way."

"I see. Then I will stay here—except——"

She clung to his arm.

"Except what?" he asked in a serious voice. The tone of assurance was completely gone.

"Except that I'm afraid," she exclaimed. "If you go away and leave me, It would be terrible here alone in this dark dank place."

Her tone too had changed. A moment before she had seemed entirely bereft of fear; she had put a complete, child-like trust in her fellow prisoner. Now, anticipating that he was going to leave her, all her fears came flocking back.

"How far away is this creek you speak of?" she asked in a faltering voice.

"Oh, not more than a hundred yards."

"A hundred yards! No, no; you must not go!"

"I will be back in less than a minute," he said calmly. "I have a little flask here which I will fill with water. You need some. You have had a terrible experience. As soon as you have had some water you will feel refreshed. It's the purest, coldest water you ever tasted."

He actually had to break away from her grasp.

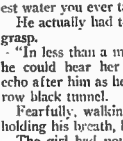
"In less than a minute—you promised;" he could hear her voice coming like an echo after him as he walked down the narrow black tunnel.

Fearfully, walking on tiptoe, and finally holding his breath, he came near the creek.

The girl had not seen that in his hand he held a horned skull, which he had picked up from the floor of the tunnel.

This was the only weapon he had with which to defend himself.

IX



TO A man of normal eyesight, it was pitch dark there by the brink of the creek. The darkness seemed absolute, as if the cavern were a universe without sun or star or moon. There was of course a certain grayness back there near the mouth of the tunnel. For light filtered in through a crevice between the boulder and the sides of the cave. Some of this grayness might even have been reflected as far as the creek, but Tom Driscoll was not aware of it. He could have been stone blind, for all the good that crevice in the tunnel did him.

He dipped his flask into the water. Strangely enough he was no longer cowed by fear, though he had expected to meet his unknown adversary here. The child-like trust which that girl had put in him, even though she had never seen him before, served to transfer his fear for his own safety completely. It emboldened him, for now his fear was the soul-stirring fear for the safety of someone else.

As the water gurgled into that flask, he

knew, so fine had his sense of hearing come in his utter blindness, that someone was on the other side of the creek.

He could imagine that thing watching him. Whatever it was, he had the definite impression that it was going to leap upon him, taking advantage of the fact that Driscoll was on his knees.

Intuitively Driscoll held his arm up over his head with one hand, while with the other he filled the flask. He was like one of those warriors of Gideon, ever ready for combat, even while drinking at the river side.

Although that flask would have taken but a moment to fill, it seemed like an eternity. The tension was too great. Driscoll leaped to his feet, backed away, thrust it into his pocket. Something had startled him, something very like a splash on the water's edge on the other side of the creek. He could stand that tension no longer; he must find out the identity of that denizen of the cave. The mere mystery of it was enough to make him mad. If he could only see what he was fighting, then his courage could be banked on; but this business of fighting an omnipresent ghost could be borne no longer.

He thrust the flask into his pocket, extracted his match-box, and lit his last, precious match.

Then he saw it.

It was impossible in that brief moment of surprise, revulsion, horror, to tell just what the thing was. Driscoll merely had a confused impression: a few details were jumbled together in his mind, out of which he could form no coherent picture. One impression was definite: the thing was large, and it stood upright. It was so close that Driscoll staggered back, and with the suddenness of his movement the match flickered, burned his hand, dropped sputtering to the water.

He turned on his heel and fled toward the gate of the tunnel, bearing in his memory the picture of a human being.

Yes, there could be no further doubt about that. He had seen a tall and imposing man.

THE girl knew that he had come back on the run. She had heard his footsteps, and she now heard him panting, as he stopped before her and reached out for her hand.

"What is wrong?" At the touch of his fingers she sprang up. "What happened? Why did you come back running like that? You don't mean that there is——"

"Yes, there is something——"

He checked himself. There was no use painting that horrible picture for the girl. She had been through enough.

"Don't be alarmed," he said quickly. "Everything is bound to come out all right. We'll stick it out until your ransom is paid and you are rescued. It won't be long. Meanwhile we must be brave."

"But I could tell the moment your hand touched mine that something had terrified you," the girl said. "What was it? Don't keep it from me. What was it that you were running from?"

Driscoll did not answer for a moment. He was trying to think just how he could tell her. It was useless to keep it a mystery. He considered how he himself had been terrified at every sound before he knew what he was facing. It was better to prepare her for what might come.

"Don't let this frighten you," he soothed. "I'm here by your side, and I will see that no harm comes to you. What I saw down there by the water—well, in a word, we are not alone. There is another man in this cave."

The girl's reaction to this surprised him.

"Another man!" she cried. "Why didn't you speak to him? Or did he attempt to fight?"

Driscoll told her of his first encounter with the man after having seen the footprint in the sand.

"By some piece of luck," he explained, "I caught him by striking out in the dark. I could hear him breathing heavily, making a noise in his nose. It was that nose I aimed at with nothing to direct my blow except what I heard there in the pitch dark. It caught him, too. Thought I'd hit some sort of flabby animal like a crocodile. It was awful, the uncanniness of it all, but, now that I've seen him by the light of that one match, the horror has gone."

He did not confess that when he actually saw this strange creature there in the water by the light of a match, he had not been at all certain whether it was human or not.

"What are you doing now?" she asked.

Driscoll was heaping up those piles of bones into a sort of barricade. He confidently expected a visit from that cave man in a very short time, perhaps within a few minutes. The man was coming across that creek when Driscoll saw him.

"Don't worry about what I'm doing,

Just clearing away some of these old bones, so we can be more comfortable. You drink your water, and you'll feel better."

"I can't." The girl gripped Driscoll's arm and clung there. That grip showed him how terrified she really was. As he was about to attempt to reassure her again, he felt her draw him forcibly to her.

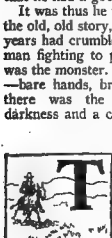
"He's coming!" she said voicelessly. "I hear something walking toward us—like padded footsteps—coming out of the dark."

Driscoll turned quickly. He had shoved the girl behind him, behind that pitiable little barrier of bones he had set up. They held their breath, and Driscoll could hear the steps. The man was heavy, ponderous. It seemed as if he were dragging himself along. There was an eternity between each step.

Driscoll balanced that cowskull with a horn in his hand. He satisfied himself that he had a good leverage on it.

It was thus he waited, cornered. It was the old, old story, as if a hundred thousand years had crumbled away. There was the man fighting to protect a woman. There was the monster. There were the weapons—bare hands, brute force, a skull. And there was the prehistoric setting—the darkness and a cave.

X



THE jovial Bill Caxton and his elongated shadow, Strawn, were waiting at the top of a little picacho, a peculiar formation of limestone rising abruptly out of the floor of the desert like a miniature mesa. From its summit they could see for a good fifteen miles in every direction. The desert bed itself was like a limitless sea of sand rivulets, dotted sparsely with barrel cactus and patches of black sage and tarweed. Even by starlight it would have been practically impossible for any man to cross that flat plain without being detected. In the day time it was simple enough, in that thin desert air, to see a rider fifteen miles away.

According to the orders tacked to the door of one of the bunkhouses of the Box-J Ranch, the ransom was to be brought by a lone messenger riding on a burro, the girl to be returned later when the bandits were sure of a clear escape.

At the time specified, an hour after dawn, when the air was clearest, they saw the burro and its rider coming.

They masked themselves. A good hour later a white-haired, grim-faced man rode up to the little rise, delivered the money and waited without a word while Bill Caxton counted it.

"All right, hombre," Caxton said. "Stick your heels into your jack and vamose."

The man remained silent, immovable.

"Are you deef?" Strawn asked apprehensively. "Why don't you vamose?"

"I want to say one thing," the white-haired rider announced with desperate calmness.

Caxton looked down at him. Although the man was mounted on a burro, he seemed to possess the dignity of a horseman. Both Caxton and Strawn were compelled to listen.

"If any harm came to that girl while she was your prisoner," the man said, "you two will be hunted down—yes, to the ends of the earth. And when you're caught you'll be tarred and burned alive."

These words fell off of the debonair Bill Caxton like water from a duck's back, but they clung to his pessimistic companion. Strawn had failed to enjoy himself in the manner of his master during this very profitable venture. He was continually visualizing the worst.

"If you want to know my opinion, Chief, I'll bet anything that hombre was the gal's own father," he exclaimed gloomily when the man rode off.

"What difference does that make, so long as he brought the money?" Caxton laughed. "I didn't specify who was to bring it; all I was particular about was what he was riding."

"Like as not," Strawn said lugubriously, "someone shagged up thar to the mountains and told the owner of the Box-J while he was with his cowpunchers. We'll have a good big posse trailin' us down into Mexico afore we're through with this game."

Caxton had no argument to make on this score. In fact he agreed affably. They rode on. It was not long before they came to the mesa where the cave was located.

Strawn was worried.

"A big posse ridin' for to get revenge for a rustled gal—that ain't overly pleasant to think about, Chief," he reminded. "Like as not they's a big reward out already for us, daid or alive, which will make this here ten thousand look pretty small. The owner of the Box-J is a rich man."

"You hurt my feelin's sayin' that,

Strawn," the other rejoined. "What I'm kickin' myself for is this: we should've demanded twenty thousand instead of a measly ten."

They reached the crest of the mesa and were riding across. Strawn kept urging his tired horse on, but Caxton seemed to be taking his time. He was in no hurry whatever to return to the mouth of that cave and liberate the girl.

"I'm tellin' you we better brush it up, Chief," Strawn warned. "A posse ridin' for a rustled gal will shore eat up a heap of trail. How come you're ridin' your horse so easy? Brush it up, I'm tellin' you."

"You mention a point there, Strawn," Bill Caxton said, "but you don't seem to have the right savvy about this kidnappin' business. I'm takin' my time freein' that girl. For why? Well, I'll tell you: no posse is goin' to trail us till they get that girl back. I figure her father's wise enough to know that would be too dangerous. I figure he knows you got to treat kidnappers right. Otherwise they're liable to get scairt, then kill off their prisoner and beat it before the negotiations are cinched. Just to be sure he'd get the point, I put a little P. S., on that note we left at the ranch—just a little hint that if he tried any ricks, or if we spotted anyone trailin' us, the lady might accidentally break her neck or get mixed up with a bullet. You get me?"

"Still and all I didn't like the look in that hombre's eye," Strawn said. "Mexico's beginnin' to look like a right comfortable place—and I'm in a hurry to 'connect up with it. You cain't tell what-all has happened to that thar gal in that cave.'

Bill Caxton did not reply until some time later when they started down the trail on the south side of the mesa.

"I've just thought of a good joke," he said suddenly.

Strawn's eyes bulged. His brown leathery face was stretched in alarm. He knew what to expect when Caxton announced the intention of playing a joke.

"And this is it," Caxton went on. "Why bother ourselves about the girl at all?"

His companion, riding a horse's length ahead of him, turned about suddenly.

"You don't mean, Chief, that you—" he gasped.

"Sure, I mean what I say. Leave the girl in the cave, that's what. It'd be a good joke. We got our money. What more do we want? Funny I didn't think of that before this. It's the best joke I ever played."

"But they don't know where the gal is," his henchman objected.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"She'd stay there the rest of her life, locked up by that boulder. She'd go crazy. She'd——"

"That makes it all the funnier," said the humorous Bill Caxton.

"God, Chief, I couldn't stand for nothin' like that! She'd ha'nt me. I'd never git the picture out'n my mind of her ravin' in thar in the dark. It's too horrible."

"Look here, Strawn. This being our first kidnapping venture, we didn't look far enough ahead. We masked ourselves when we raided the Box-J, and later when we got the ransom, but we didn't mask ourselves from the girl. If we free her she can identify us. She'll likewise tell 'em we put her in that cave, which is on the trail across the Borax Sierra. That means they'll have some idea how to start their pursuit—after she gets back. There are some good reasons for leaving the girl where she is, and don't forget the best reason of all: they'll be pretty careful about trailin' us openly until they know the girl is safely returned. If we don't return her at all, that delays their whole game."

Inasmuch as Strawn was considerably more cowardly than his master, even though he was not as cruel, he saw the point. The safest thing to do was to keep the girl imprisoned. But there was that dreadful picture of her being in there, helpless, and losing her mind in the unending night.

"Chief," Strawn said finally, "just so's my mind will git some peace, I got an idee. I cain't go ridin' off leavin' that gal to go daft in that thar hole. It'll make me daft just dreamin' about her. You remember what she said when we put her in: 'Give me a six-gun', she said. 'for myself——'"

"I remember. Wanted to protect herself, as she said, from going looced in the dark. A good safe and sane way, too!"

"What do you say, Chief, to givin' her a six-gun and let her put an end to all our worries—includin' her own?"

Caxton stared at his henchman quizzically.

"Not bad," he agreed. "But this business of giving her a deadly weapon—I don't like it. What if some turn of luck gave her a chance to use it on us?"

"How can she use it on us, she bein' locked up behind that boulder? Of course

if we stood right in front of that thar slit she might pot us. But we ain't no call to stand in front of no slit."

Bill Caxton was still opposed on general principles, but there was a grim drama in this business which appealed strongly to his imagination. Then, too, it was a way of completely covering up their tracks.

"What if she doesn't use it on herself as she promised?"

"What's lost?" Strawn asked pointedly.

"True enough. Nothing's lost. No harm done, and it's a powerful good ending to the whole show. There's a ghost of a chance that someone might bump along and let her out if she still went on living. Your idea's a right smart one, Strawn. We'll give her a six-gun as you suggest so kindly, and then forget her."

It was with this intention that Bill Caxton and his apprehensive partner went up to the mouth of the cave.

ON THE crest of the mesa a white-haired, hook-nosed squaw was leading a pack burro. Reaching the edge of the cliffs, she looked down on the zigzag trail which Caxton and Strawn were traveling. They had not seen this strange, vulture-like figure perched there on the crags, but she had seen them. As they passed by she had hidden in a little barranca, hiding her pack burro in the chapparral.

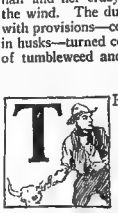
It would be hard to conjecture just what the two outlaws would have done had they seen that astonishing picture of a witch with a well-laden pack burro. They might have appropriated the pack for the sake of the provisions. On the other hand, they might have been so startled that they would have hit the trail for the border without so much as stopping at the cave's mouth to taunt their hapless victim.

From her hiding-place the old crone herself watched them as they trailed down the face of the mesa. Perhaps they were going on into the desert to the south. That was what she wanted to know. Eagerly she waited; then, as they reached the bottom, she saw them dismount and walk toward the mouth of the cave, the Snare of the Bad Mind.

It was then that the old witch let out a vehement, rasping scream. At the same time she took up two rocks, one in each scrawny fist, and went running, tottering, staggering down the trail after them.

The old gray burro seemed to have no appreciation of the savage and dramatic picture his mistress made with her white hair and her crazy quilt skirts trailing in the wind. The dumb brute, heavily laden with provisions—corn meal, bacon, tamales in husks—turned complacently to his lunch of tumbleweed and saguaro sap.

XI



THE fight between Tom Driscoll and the cave-man finally came, but not until the passing of many nerve-racking hours. Driscoll and the girl must have waited for a day and a night, during which they repeatedly heard the soft pad of footsteps coming down that tunnel, then, when within a few yards, receding again.

All this time as Tom waited he knew that a combat was coming that would tax every iota of his physical power and courage. Of course he completely forgot his wound. Men have been known to be severely wounded in the excitement of battle without realizing it.

Finally the footsteps came, this time resolutely, nearer and nearer. There was no pause. They could hear the breathing, louder than the soft pad of bare feet. It was then, as Driscoll stood with a cow-skull balanced by a horn held in his hand, that he heard a strange voice speaking to him.

It came out of the darkness, a hollow, bass voice, mouthing words with intense difficulty. It reminded Driscoll and the girl of a dumb man who had been taught to speak, but does so with an unnatural and forced movement of lips and diaphragm.

"You put that skull down, hombre."

The words sent a chill through the two unfortunate prisoners—not only because of the strangeness of the voice, but because of the alarming fact that the speaker could see in the dark. Tom, in other words was completely at his mercy.

One thing was certain: Tom Driscoll had no intention of putting down that weapon, pitiably insufficient as it was. He swung it in front of him like a scythe in huge sweeps, hoping by some miraculous turn of luck to land on that unseen target.

This time his luck failed him. There was just enough light filtering through that aperture between the boulder and the side

of the cave to give his adversary the use of his eyes. To Driscoll it was pitch dark. With this advantage the cave-man waited for his chance at an opening. It came. Even while Tom Driscoll was frantically swinging that skull and lurching forward with the hope of driving back his man, he was caught by a heavy blow on the mouth, which sent him reeling back. He swung wildly in the dark, only to hit the empty air. Another blow caught him on the chest, a blow that had an immeasurable weight behind it.

There was no use trying to dodge those smashes. He had to take them. Since there was no defense, Driscoll resolved to close in.

His adversary was slow, there was no doubt about that. He was lumbering, huge, weighted with fat. That was why his blows were so staggering. Properly timed, they could have broken a man's neck. Rather than to stand there in the dark making a windmill of his arms and landing nowhere, Driscoll leaped forward blindly. A huge fist caught him, sending a zigzag flash through his brain. He fell forward, clutching, grasping at the air, then at dank mildewed rags, then at flabby flesh.

He clung like a drowning man to a straw. He dragged himself up from his knees. He was thrown back, still keeping a vise-like grip on that flesh. The weight followed him as he banged against the granite wall of the cave. It pressed against him. He fell. The weight was on his chest, suffocating him. He felt as if some enormous thing like an octopus were pressing out his life with slimy and viscous tentacles. He tried to squirm free. He struggled violently with his arms. They too were imprisoned under the weight, but he could move them, shoving them upward by sheer force to the man's chest, to his beefy shoulders. He felt of the neck; it was soft without anything that felt like cord or muscle. The man was fighting him not with strength but with weight alone.

Driscoll's powerful hands clutched the pudgy throat.

The breathing, directed upon his own face, grew harsh, rasping. Driscoll tightened his clutch, dug his fingers in. He felt as if he were actually piercing the flesh. The caveman choked; his weight settled down inert. Driscoll wriggled from under it. Still clutching to that throat, he heard the man cry out in choking, incoherent sentences.

"Hombre, I'm through—I'm through!" he gasped. "Don't kill me! You got me down—I'm through!" He rolled over heavily.

Driscoll's arms followed without relaxing. The man's head lolled backward under the unyielding grip.

"Put your hands up here to your face," Driscoll ordered.

The cave-man obeyed.

With a knee pressing upon his huge chest, and one hand still at that throat, Driscoll unbuckled his own belt and strapped it around the man's pudgy wrists.

Panting heavily to regain his breath, the cave-man submitted.

"Then you ain't goin' to kill me, hombre?" he grunted piteously when he was made prisoner. "You're lettin' me live? I thought you was goin' to kill me. They all want to kill me—all of 'em!"

"Before I make up my mind what to do with you," Driscoll said, "I want to know why you attacked me?"

"Attacked you!" the man cried, still with that strange piteous voice. "It was you attackt-ed me. You all do, every hombre as gits caught in here. First thing they do is to try to kill me. I stayed out'n yer way, didn't I? Till you came back thar by the creek. Then it was you knocked me down with a blow which it all but broke my jaw."

"Who wouldn't have done that," Driscoll exclaimed, "having you there hovering over me? It was enough to make any man fight for his life. If you had called to me——"

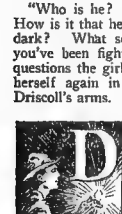
"Ah, hombre, now you've said it. I called to the last man as he got caught here, and he drew out his shootin' iron and throwed it on me—fired every shot. Lucky he couldn't see or I wouldn't be alive to tell you of it. That's why I didn't call out to you, hombre. I wanted to wait and git your gun off'n you first. Then, when I found you weren't armed, I saw you was sot on killin' me with your bare hands."

Driscoll was too surprised to know immediately what to do. The man was too mysterious to trust. In some ways his existence there presented a very serious danger; he could see what was going on, whereas Driscoll could not.

"I'm not going to kill you," Tom said, "but don't you move. You stay there. If I hear you moving, I'll climb you again. The next time I won't let you off so easy." He groped his way over to the girl to reassure her. This fight in the dark must

have been a horrible affair in her mind. "Where are you, girl? Give me your hands. How are you? You aren't afraid any more? I've got him strapped. Don't be afraid."

"Who is he? What is he doing here? How is it that he can see here in the pitch dark? What sort of a beast is it that you've been fighting?" These were the questions the girl whispered as she found herself again in the protection of Tom Driscoll's arms.



DRISCOLL recalled the scene at the creek side when he had caught that one terrifying glimpse of the cave man. He remembered that the man had covered his eyes with his huge hands, as if the light of the match were blinding him. This suggested the fact that he had probably been in that cave without any ray of light for a long time. How long that time was no one could tell, not even the man himself, perhaps. There were other unmistakable evidences of his having been buried in there without sunlight, without any exercise.

Driscoll recalled stories of those Buddhist monks in Asia who immure themselves, leaving only a small aperture in the walls of their dark caves, throught which food is given to them. These monks, so travelers say, sit immovable in contemplation, for years, until they become fat, bloated, pale. That one momentary glimpse of this man which Driscoll had had, showed him all these traits.

"Look here, you," he called out to the cave man, "tell me this: just how long have you been here?"

"How do I know?" the man answered in a heart-rending sort of wail.

"Tell me in a general way. Has it been weeks? Has it been months?"

The answer to this was a gurgling sneer. Tom Driscoll felt the girl shudder against him.

"It's been years," the man said.

"I don't believe you. You're lying."

Of course, he must be lying. Or else he was crazed. A few hours seemed like so many weeks, buried there in that darkness. Besides, a man can't live on mushrooms and water. It was preposterous, and it was horrifying. A man might be able to live without sunlight; he might lie there in that dank cave and crawl about in the water and ooze of that creek, turning slowly into a bloated, amphibious creature like a toad—but how about food?

"How do you expect me to believe anything like that?" he asked. "If you've been here for even as long as a month, where did you get your food?"

The man burst into a string of oaths, growling and spitting like a maddened dog.

The girl gripped Driscoll fearfully. Without a doubt the fellow was crazed. Why should such a thing as the mention of food throw him into a fit of fury?

"That's a simple enough question," Driscoll said. "If you expect me to believe you've been in here more than a few days, tell me where you get your food."

"I'll tell you, hombre. You won't believe me, but I'll tell you. I ain't locoed; what I'm telin' you is the honest-to-God truth, so help me. I-git my food throwed down to me from up above. There's a crevice in this here mesa just above the cave. It's a tiny split in the rock, too narrow to crawl up through, but if you drop anything into it from the top of the mesa it'll slide down."

"Who drops your food down to you?" Tom Driscoll asked in a voice of total disbelief.

"She does, up thar. That hell-cat! That she-devil! That demon! She's been doin' it to keep me alive. Her hate wasn't bad enough to bury me in here, trap me, shut me in a grave so's I could die. No; she wanted me to live, to go on through years of this livin' death. And I was weak enough to accept. Couldn't starve. I was too much sot on life—that I was. I had to eat—I had to go on hopin' for freedom—and the years rolled by——"

Still it was incredible. It was preposterous to think of. Tom Driscoll could concede now that the cave man had been there a few months perhaps. But years? He shuddered. His mind rejected the very thought of it; it was too horrible.

"Just when do you figure you were put in here. Is there no possible way of your estimating?"

"I can't tell, but you can," the man replied. "Do you remember a fight they had down to that forsaken minin' town at Sody Mesa; a fight when three white men held off a band of Papagoes? One of the whites died; another escaped, but the Papagoes took one prisoner and give him over to a squaw—like they always do with their prisoners for to be tortured. I was that thar prisoner."

Driscoll tried to think.

"Seems to me I've heard of something of the sort," he answered.

"I reckon it was too long ago," the cave man said.

"I can remember," the girl said. "It was not far from our ranch. A man came in wounded; said he had been attacked by Papagoes near Soda Mesa and had lost his two companions. A posse was sent to hunt for them. One of his companions was found dead. The other they could not find."

"That's the story! That's the story! I was in that fight!" the man cried. "I killed one of the chiefs. He was a young Papago, but it was a fair fight. I killed him with a bowie knife and his mother seen me. They turned me over to her when I was captured. If you want torture, git a mother who's yearnin' for to avenge the death of her children. Her first-born—that's what this here witch called him.

"A fair fight too, hombre, do you git that? And I've been rottin' here in hell ever since. That was what she done. Buried me alive—and she's still livin', too. When she dies, I'll die. But she's up thar. She brings me corn meal and bacon and Indian tamales she's cooked herself. She's worked up her revenge so long that she's crazy wild. Eats that peyote plant to keep her hate livin'."

He cried out in desperation as he finished his recital, his voice breaking, howling choking, with almost maniacal oaths.

"Hombre, I believe what you say," Driscoll spoke up to quiet him. "They've imprisoned you and want to keep you alive so that you'll suffer that much longer. I believe that part of it, but when you say you've been in here more than a month——"

"Years! Years!" the wretched man cried. "Judge for yourself; the gal there—she says she heard of that fight. When was it? If you remember that fur back, you kin tell just how long I been buried here a prisoner."

The girl reflected for but a moment. Her answer was astounding. Yet it confirmed Driscoll's belief that the man had been so tortured by the darkness that his sense of time had been completely obliterated. He was like a hasheesh eater who, when drugged, thinks that it takes an eternity to merely lift an arm.

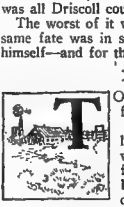
"You think you have been here for years?" the girl said. "Well, you are very much mistaken. The fight at Soda Mesa took place just two months ago."

"Years! Years! Years!" The man let out a tortured wail.

"Good God, how long he has suffered," was all Driscoll could say.

The worst of it was, it looked as if the same fate was in store for Tom Driscoll himself—and for that girl.

XII



TOM DRISCOLL refused to give up.

"Quiet down," he silenced the cave man's wailing. "I'm going to free you. You'll soon be out of here. But quiet down I tell you."

"What-all do you mean by that—you're goin' to free me? What does that mean?" the man asked in a changed voice.

Driscoll recounted in a few words his own adventures.

"Two bandits threw me in here. The same two rode to the desert rim to a ranch where they abducted this girl. They are holding her for ransom. She says her father will pay the money without question. When the bandits free her, she will see that we are rescued also."

Again there came that uncanny laugh from the throat of the cave man. Tom Driscoll and the girl were chilled to the marrow of their bones. That laugh had in it more meaning than when the man actually used words.

"Why do you laugh at that?" Driscoll asked hotly.

"I was laughing at what you said, 'When the bandits free her'."

"What is there so funny about that?"

"You will find out. We are here for life. That's what's so funny. Them bandits won't come back. Bet your life on that. She won't let 'em—the witch up thar. She'll see to it. She'll cast a spell on 'em. She'll scare 'em. When they see her they won't dast come back.

"I've seen that witch, as you call her," Driscoll said. "She tried to scare me away. Who's afraid of an old squaw?"

"All right; there you are. She cast her spell over you, didn't she? I ain't sayin' how she'll keep them bandits of yourn away, but she will. She'll rustle 'em off into hell one way or another for comin' near this cave. It's her cave and she'll see to it. One way or another they'll come to their end. Maybe she'll shoot 'em. Maybe she'll stone 'em to death. Maybe they'll end up in here—like you. One way or another she'll git 'em."

The girl had a peculiar premonition of what might happen. She evoked Bill Caxton's figure, his jovial face, and that fiendish light playing in his brown eyes. He was capable of anything, of any cruelty beyond the conception of a normal mind.

"What if they do not come back!" she exclaimed suddenly.

"It can't be possible. To leave you here? What fiend on this earth could think of such a crime?"

"But if they don't come back?" the girl persisted.

"We're in here for life," the cave man announced.

"We're not in here for life." Tom Driscoll cried desperately. "If they don't come back, we'll get out some other way. I'll find a way, I tell you. I'll chip this boulder down, if there's no other way."

"It's marble. I've tried it." the cave man said. "There ain't a rock in the whole cave as hard as that boulder. It can't be done, hombre; I've tried it for years."

"I'll dig my way out through the wall——"

"Through a granite mountain," the cave man said almost tauntingly. "That shows you're gettin' locoed already, hombre."

"This boulder is only jammed by a little stone, not much larger than an egg."

"I heard tell onct of a band of desperadoes caught with their horses and the steers they rustled. Their leader played a trick on 'em. If a band of twenty men couldn't shove that boulder when she's jammed, what can you do?"

In sheer desperation Tom Driscoll had been feeling that boulder, groping about on every side. When he came to the crevice through which a bit of the reflected light of the outside world filtered in, he called to the girl.

"I see it now," he said. "There's the little stone right there. That black spot which cuts that long line of light in half. That's the key rock. If I could reach that——"

"I've watched that little stone day after day till I was like to go blind," the cave man snorted. "How can you reach it?

Tom Driscoll felt the girl clutch him suddenly. It was a grip having all the strength of her arms; it was frantic, desperate.

"Listen! Do you hear what I hear?" she said tensely. "Someone is out there."

"Good God! They've come back!" Driscoll cried exultantly. "They've come back. We're free! We're free!"

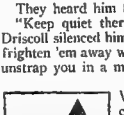
"What's that? What's that, hombre?" the cave man cried. "Come back? Who's come back? The bandits? Free, are we? They goin' to let the gal out? What do you mean? No, no; it ain't true. It can't be true. She ain't heard right."

The girl and Driscoll waited with bated breath. In the interval of silence they could hear the cave man jibbering, grunting, pulling at the strap that bound his wrists.

"If they're comin', you'll free me, pard?" he cried piteously. "You won't leave me? You won't forgit me, a pore old mucker that's losin' his mind? Here, quick, pard, unstrap my hands. B'God I won't be left! I'll fight like a madman—I'll bust off this strap myself!"

They heard him fighting frantically.

"Keep quiet there, or the game's up," Driscoll silenced him with an oath. "We'll frighten 'em away with your howling. I'll unstrap you in a minute."



A WHISTLE at the crevice of the cave silenced all three as if by magic.

A voice rang out, a voice that seemed to come from an infinite distance, from another world. Both Driscoll and the girl recognized it as the pleasant but taunting voice of Bill Caxton.

"He is afraid to open the rock," Driscoll said. "He is afraid I'll rush out on him. You answer him. Be careful what you say. If you frighten him, it's all up. Let him think that I'm dead."

With Tom Driscoll's help, the girl climbed up over the shoulder of the huge marble rock until she was stopped by the roof of the cave. Here, leaning as near as she could to the opening, she called out to Bill Caxton.

"Here I am! Let me out! Why don't you let me out?"

"Let you out, my little girl?" Bill Caxton's voice came back, jovial, mocking. "I didn't come to let you out. I came to tell you another little joke."

"You didn't come to let me out?" the girl gasped. "What can you mean by that? What kind of a fiend are you that you can say that?"

"Having received the money for your ransom, it occurred to me that there is no real necessity for letting you out at all," Bill Caxton called jocosely.

"How can you dare do this terrible

thing?" the girl cried. "Have you no fear —even of God?"

"The hereafter does not trouble me," Bill Caxton rejoined. "The present is a different matter, and that is why I'm going to say good-by to you where you are. If we freed you, you would help in our capture. And then there's that unpleasant little matter about that mucker we shoved into the cave a few days ago. If he's still alive, it would be most disagreeable to meet him."

"He is not alive," the girl said, proving herself quite equal to making up a story for the occasion. "I found him in here dying. He had made an attempt upon his own life and was finally successful."

"Very interesting—if true," Caxton replied. "Nevertheless, I'm not going to trouble myself by opening this cave. Why should I? Our little game is over. Your father was a good sport—and a good loser."

"Do you mean you're going to leave me here all my life?" the girl cried. "No! No! You dare not! I'll go mad! I'll go mad if you leave me here another hour!"

"That brings me to the real point of my visit," Caxton called in affably. "I remember your making a request when we last saw each other. You wanted a six-gun with which to protect yourself from the tortures of madness. My heart relents. I must do one good deed before we part. I figured it would do us all a lot of good. I can't bear to think of you in there groping around and suffering such agony. It fairly breaks my heart—so here is the six-gun."

"No! No! Don't go away! I don't want a gun! I want to be free! Do you realize what you're doing? You're burying me alive!"

Tom Driscoll, who had listened to every word with a vital and consuming tensity, reached up and gripped the girl's hand.

"Get the six-gun," he whispered. "Don't refuse it, for God's sake! It's all I need."

"You mean you've changed your mind, my lady?" Bill Caxton's remote soft voice was again heard through the crevice. "It was all you wanted, the last time we met!"

"Yes, yes; I want it now! If you're so fiendish as to bury me here in darkness for life, at least show me that much mercy." Her voice did not lack the ring of sincerity. Every word was pitiful, hysterical. "If you are merciful enough for that, let me have the gun—for myself."

"Very well then, my lady," Caxton said pleasantly. "Here it is. I can just slide it through this opening. Use it right away. Can't tell when your mind'll go back on you. Very uncertain business, that. Do yourself a favor, and also do me a favor. Let me hear it. It'll settle everything."

There came the sharp clatter of steel against marble, as the six-gun slid through a narrow opening between the boulder and the cave top. It slid down in a series of bumps, striking a spark out of the rock as it hit the granite floor.

"All right, girl, come on down," Tom Driscoll said in a voice that was startlingly calm. "We're free."

"Free?" the girl exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Free?" the cave man repeated scoffingly. "That's a good one." His voice trailed off into a gurgling, snorting laugh.

"I mean what I say," Driscoll announced calmly, as he groped on the cavern floor for the weapon. "All I have to do is to shoot that little stone out of place, and the boulder is unlocked. Here, you hombre," he said to the cave man; "you get up. I'll unstrap your hands. You lean your weight against this boulder when I powder that little stone to bits. As soon as it's loose you shove."

"Good God, pard!" the huge cave man cried hoarsely. "I'm dreamin', or I'm mad, or—or else I'll swear you've got the trick. We're goin' to be free! We're goin to be free!" He started to howl jubilantly. "Free! The light! The sun! The world! I'm free!"

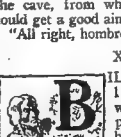
Driscoll had unstrapped his wrists and was now fingering the cylinder of his revolver.

"Every chamber full," he said, his calm suddenly giving way to the excitement of victory. "Every chamber full; the damnable fiends wanted the girl to have six tries. I'll save a couple for them."

He climbed up to a ledge on the side of the cave, from which vantage point he could get a good aim.

"All right, hombre, get ready."

XIII



BILL CAXTON was laughing. Strawn waiting, his face ashen pale, his long ghastly head inclined in the attitude of listening. Both waited to hear the sound of that gun.

Behind them was a malign figure, hover-

ing like a hungry vulture on the scene of death. The virulent and half-mad Papago squaw had followed the two outlaws to the base of the mesa and to the mouth of the cave. They did not see her. If they had, Strawn would probably have trembled still more with apprehension of what was coming, and Bill Caxton most certainly would have stopped laughing. She was like those mythical beasts, half woman, half bird, who hovered about the fields of battle waiting to snatch up the souls of the dead.

The old squaw was at her wit's end. The cave where she had kept her luckless prisoner for many moons was now becoming a bandit's cache. The boulder would be opened. Her prisoner would be liberated. He would kill her.

She was too late. When she arrived, one of the bandits, the younger one with the twinkling brown eyes and the laughing mouth, had already approached the cave, climbed part way up that rock, and was shouting to someone inside. It seemed that he was not going to open the boulder after all; at least not yet.

The old crone waited, her toothless mouth mumbling incantations, her crooked shoulders shaking, her chest heaving with fury and trepidation. Those bandits must be driven away; she would see to that. She would kill them. They must not get away before she killed them, for they might come back some other time when she was not there.

Craftily she hobbled off into the brush again, taking the horses with her. She would send them galloping down toward the open plain. Then, when the bandits chased after them, she would leap out upon them and beat them with stones and with her claws. Bullets? What did she care for their bullets. They would be too fear-stricken to draw. She would tear them to pieces; she would hurl big stones upon their foreheads.

"WHAT are you waitin' for, Chief?" Strawn asked. "Let's hit the trail. I want to drift as far from this cave as there's a hoss in the world to pack me. It's beginnin' to work on my nerves. Come on, Chief; let's trail it. Far and pronto, them's my sentiments," he added with considerable fervor. "Far and pronto."

"Strawn, you surprise me," Bill Caxton reproved. "Always lookin' for somethin' to give you a kick. Well, here it is, the biggest thrill any showman ever staged. Imagine a gal behind that rock, with a six-gun in her hand. Pitch dark. Girl begged for something to kill herself with. Afraid of spendin' the rest of her life in the dark. Bingo goes the gun. That's what I'm waitin' for. No gun in the world ever had the kick of that gun, so to speak." He laughed at the turn of his phrase. "When I say 'kick', I don't only mean the gun's kick. I mean we all get it—the biggest thrill in life. There she goes!"

The nervous and imaginative Strawn put his fists to his ears. Yes, that sound certainly came up to expectations. Even Bill Caxton stopped laughing. His joke had been superbly staged, so superbly that it thrilled even him. The grim smile on his face trembled.

"Damned if I thought she'd do it that quick," he exclaimed. "Come on, Strawn; let's shag out of here."

They both turned to flee for their horses, as if to flee from some spell that was beginning to weave about them. The horses were gone. Instead there was an old hook-nosed harpy standing in their path, cursing them, shrieking maledictions, holding two rocks in her yellow claws.

Stopping dead in their tracks, Caxton and Strawn were aware of another peculiar circumstance. There was a slight tremor of the ground, almost imperceptible, but they felt it in the soles of their boots.

The hook-nosed witch dropped both rocks precipitously, and her claws remained open, uplifted in an attitude of abject horror. She emitted a wild scream, like a vulture screeching with fury and fear at some marauder in its eerie. Then, with arms still uplifted, throat still torn by that cry, she turned and fled, her white hair and brilliant robe streaming in the wind.

This had happened in one brief moment. Caxton and Strawn immediately turned to see what it was that the old crone had seen. They looked toward the mouth of the cave.

The big boulder had rolled open!

There, emerging from the dark, was a huge figure in rags, at once grotesque, hideous, imposing. He was gigantic, inhuman. He seemed to emerge from the granite itself. He held his arms across his face, folded tightly as if the sun were burning him alive.

Bill Caxton, the outlaw, bent his will

to move what seemed a paralyzed hand. It went falteringly to his holster. It drew out a gun that shook like a twig of mesquite in a storm. It went off without aim, kicking back into his wabbling palm, his nerveless wrist.

Strawn, without attempting to draw, had fallen to his knees.

Another gun barked out from the semi-darkness of the opened cave.

Bill Caxton fell.

He saw the girl come out with Tom Driscoll, both shading their eyes from the glare of the sun. He saw the trembling Strawn, lift up his ungainly hands in surrender.

That was a good joke, Bill Caxton thought. A grim smile came to his tight, gray lips. His brown eyes turned upward weakly, showed one gleam of light. A very good joke indeed; he had given that very gun to the girl and it was the weapon that had dealt him his death-wound.

His teeth showed. The blinking man standing over him—it was Driscoll, the man he had tricked and imprisoned "for life"—this man spoke to him. What he said mattered little. Something about roasting in hell; something about surrendering a gun; something about ransom money; something about a reward.

The only answer Bill Caxton gave was a low laugh, trailing off into a series of gasps. It was impossible to tell just when he was laughing at the man standing above him, just when he was struggling for his last few gasps of life.

THE whole world was before Driscoll. He had broken Bill Caxton's gang; the body of the Mexican breed in the mesquite, the body of Caxton himself, was all the proof necessary. And Strawn was to be taken prisoner. For all this there was a good reward. Then, for the return of the girl to the owner of the Box-J and the return of the ransom money, there would be another and a larger reward. Fame and fortune had come in the turn of one moment, like the spinning of a roulette wheel.

"You're coming with us, hombre," Driscoll said to Strawn. "I ought to put you in the cave there, but I want to introduce you to the owner of the Box-J; he'll be glad to meet you. So will the sheriff. And they'll be glad to meet these two deceased gentlemen, the breed over there and the jovial Mr. Caxton."

He turned to the cave man who was waiting, blinded by the terrific glare of the desert sun. The girl was blindfolding him with her bandana to protect his sight. Driscoll's own eyes were now more accustomed to the light; the first shock and glare had passed.

"We'll see that you get back to civilization and freedom, hombre," Driscoll said to him. "Lucky these bandits made this their headquarters the last day or two. It means we have plenty of mounts. When the sun gets a little lower, we'll hit the trail."

This was only part of the victory of Tom Driscoll in that hour of liberation. There was one other thrill far more important than the defeat of Bill Caxton's gang, with its promised reward. It was a very peculiar thrill, one which few men or women have ever known.

When they had come out of the cave, and Caxton had fallen, Tom Driscoll turned to the girl. She was looking at him. There was the highest, the most exciting point of all their adventures: to see each other for the first time. They had come from the dark in which they had faced death—yes, even madness, together. They had known each other only by their voices. It was as if they had come from a remote age in the past in which the man had fought for the woman, like a primitive man-beast fighting for his mate.

There was no disillusionment as the prehistoric ages vanished, leaving them once again in the present and facing each other. Or it is perhaps more to the point to say that they had both stepped abruptly out of a dream and found each other real!

ASH HOLLOW

ASH HOLLOW was a famous place in the history of the Platte Valley. It was the first camping site of the emigrants on the North Fork after they had forded the South Platte and crossed the divide. It lay about fifteen miles from the famous Old California Crossing, and is the place where General Harney, in 1855, slaughtered the Brule Sioux. It had a fine spring and a fair stand of timber, lay about five hundred miles west of Independence, Mo., and about as far east of South Pass, and was named Coulee des Frenes by Fremont.—C. E. M.

BLACK JACK, WANTED—DEAD OR ALIVE

By ARTHUR CHAPMAN

Author of "Jack Slade—Man-Killer"

Cattle rustling and sheep stealing were small game, so Black Jack Ketchum and his gang started a new program, one in which stores, banks, and trains yielded heavy toll—a program so successful that the whole Southwest anxiously awaited the call of the hold-up men

BLACK JACK KETCHUM rode into Nogales just as many another man had spurred in from the surrounding Arizona ranges.

On one side of him rode his brother Sam. On the other was Bud Hansford, cowpuncher, cattle rustler and general ne'er-do-well.

"Now remember," said Black Jack, as the trio paused before entering the business district of the sleepy town, "we're going after big stuff from now on. No more cattle rustling and sheep stealing for us. We're headed right for the First National Bank."

It was the first working out of a philosophic code which Black Jack voiced many times thereafter, during his long career as bank robber, train robber and outlaw-in-general in the Southwest.

Cracking the bank at Nogales was to be Black Jack's first excursion into "big business." He had not nerved himself up to the work with whisky. He had no need to, for he was a man of iron nerve and determination. Tall and broad-shouldered, and with a black beard which stood out in startling contrast with the red handkerchief about his neck, he was an ideal horseman and might have been chosen as the "heavy" for the melodramatic performances of the "movies" which were then just in their beginning. Heavy and powerful of build, he had chosen a horse of extra strength for the work ahead of him. If there was any element of doubt or hesitation in his mind, it did not show in his blazing black eyes. His companions looked at Black Jack and were reassured. Behind such a leader they were willing to take any sort of desperate chance.

"The bank it is," Sam Ketchum agreed, with a trace of admiration in his voice. "Let's go, Jack."

The three men aroused no comment as they clattered into town on their cow ponies. That was in 1896, before automobiles were numerous in the Southwest, and there were cow ponies at many of the hitching racks in front of saloons and

stores. It was high noon and the hot sun beat down from a cloudless sky. The ponies, in common with almost everybody and everything else in Nogales, were snoozing. Soon there were to be little wisps of powder smoke drifting between that sky and the eyes of Nogales's hard-fighting citizenry.

Black Jack and his two companions dropped off their horses in front of the bank, and, leaving the well-trained animals with the reins dragging, made their way inside.

The cashier was at his window, chatting with a cattleman who had just deposited several thousand dollars. Most of the other employees were out at lunch—or dinner as they called it in Nogales.

No time was wasted in preliminaries. Black Jack was going to work out his new philosophy without delay.

"Hands up!" the cashier was ordered, Black Jack shoving the cattleman aside and thrusting two big guns well into the cage.

"Come and get it, Sam," he then called to his brother.

Sam Ketchum reached into the cage and took the money the cattleman had just deposited. Then he grabbed such bundles of bills as were within reach.

"There's some gold in that till—fish it out," Black Jack directed the cashier. "Don't try to reach under the counter, or I'll blow you inside out."

The cashier was a man of plenty of nerve. He had been through hold-ups before and he would have put up a fight if there had been any chance for success. But he knew better than to risk a fight when a man like this bearded bandit "had the drop". He dutifully scooped out the gold in the till and put it where Sam Ketchum could gather it in.

Black Jack's code of philosophy seemed to be working out in a practical way. The bandit's black eyes took on a gleam of satisfaction.

But just here Fate took a hand. A playful breeze rioted across the far reaches of the desert and paid a visit to Nogales. It arrived at the bank just when Black Jack and his companions, intent on getting the funds in the big safe, had lined up the cashier and the other employees against the wall.

The breeze slammed a back door in the bank. The door swung shut with a noise like the explosion of a gun.

"We're trapped!" Black Jack cried with an oath. "Get to the horses, boys, and shoot at everything in sight!"

The bandits dashed out of the bank, shooting as they ran, to keep the employees from following. But the cashier and the others in the bank, including the cattleman who had seen his funds disappear, were willing to take a chance in open warfare where every man had an even break. Guns began popping from the main door and the windows of the bank.

By the time the bandits had reached their horses, the citizens of Nogales had begun to swarm into the street, and they all came armed. Bullets began to whine around the bandits as they climbed into their saddles. The fire was returned with such vigor by Black Jack and his companions that the first to reach the street were compelled to seek shelter again. This gave the three men a chance to make a dash for their lives. Through the main street they clattered, this time at a pelting gallop.

Before a successful pursuit could be organized the bandits had made their getaway. They were out in the sand hills, dividing enough money to bear out Black Jack's assertion that, if one were going into the business of wresting a living from a reluctant world, the wresting might as well be done on a big scale.

FOR two or three years before this hold-up of the bank at Nogales, Black Jack and his brother had been content to rustle cattle. They depleted the herds of cattlemen in Arizona, New Mexico and Southern Colorado, and what they did not know about the topography of the big country they covered was not worth knowing. Also they had formed the nucleus of a gang that could be depended on in any emergency.

What was more important, they had terrorized ranchmen in all sections of their "stamping ground" until they could be sure of hiding-places and fresh mounts almost anywhere. Not that the ranchmen were in league with the men who were stealing their cattle, but they had found that any refusal to aid these desperate men in the crises that were constantly arriving was the equivalent of signing a death warrant. It was well enough to be on the side of law and order, but when one was a lonely ranchman, with the sheriff many miles away and with cattle rustlers and desperadoes on all sides—well, many a

good citizen simply had to go against his own desires and furnish grub and remounts to men who should be gracing the gallows.

Following the Nogales bank robbery Black Jack's gang defied the authorities as they had not been defied since the days of Billy the Kid. Stage-coaches were robbed, banks and express offices broken into, and lonely post offices were depleted of their supplies of coin and stamps. The outlaws covered vast stretches of territory in their operations. An outbreak in the lower part of Arizona, close to the border, might be followed by a robbery in Southern Colorado. Posses that were sent out on the trail were either eluded or beaten off. Sometimes the bandits met with resistance, and then they killed without mercy.

John A. Bishop, manager of the Hualpi Mining Company's store at Kingman, Arizona, put up a brave fight when he was confronted by members of Black Jack's gang and told to hand over the cash in the safe. Bishop was a man of supreme courage. Single-handed he battled with several of the bandits, though he had been taken by surprise. A knife thrust stretched him out on the floor of the store—dead. Then the bandits rifled the place at their leisure and rode away with $1,400 in cash.

The next day the store of the Resolute Mining Company at Ash Fork, fifty miles away, was held up and robbed by the same gang. At Deming, New Mexico, before the flurry over the Nogales affair had quieted down, Black Jack and his gang held up a faro game. The dealer put up a fight and was killed. Several of those in the place, who tried to escape, were wounded.

After this affair at Deming, several post offices were held up. This was easy work, but it savored too much of the yeggman's methods to suit a bandit of Black Jack's peculiar attainments. Besides, it did not fit in with his code of philosophy—to go after the big things. But the robbery of the post offices put a new idea into Black Jack's head.

Why not try train robbing? It promised much greater rewards than holding up little post offices.

In order to try out their new plan, Black Jack and his confederates selected a new field of operations. They held up several trains on the Southern Pacific in Texas, and each time got away with many thousands of dollars.

These robberies put the Texas Rangers on their trail, and Black Jack and his followers soon found that state too warm for them. They shifted their operations into New Mexico, where they held up a Santa Fe train and secured much booty. Again came well-organized pursuit, necessitating flight into Arizona.

The stage coach plying between Tombstone and Grant Springs was held up. One passenger, a bit slow in holding up his hands at the command of the masked men who had stopped the stage at a lonely spot in the road, was shot in cold blood. The ferocity of this deed appalled the country and confirmed the authorities in the opinion that in Black Jack and his gang they had to deal with desperadoes of the worst type—men who could plan and execute big crimes and yet were not above killing with a tiger-like ferocity which the Kid himself might have envied.

Black Jack continued to strike with astounding regularity, in spite of the fact that state and county authorities were watching for him and every cashier in bank or store was on guard against a surprise attack. Guards had been put on the railroad trains, but this did not alarm Black Jack, who by this time had come to consider himself immune.

Near Gallup, New Mexico, Black Jack held up a Santa Fe train. This was one of the boldest jobs on record, being close to a city, in the heart of a country that was supposed to be ready and waiting for the bandit to put in an appearance. The courageous express messenger showed fight and was killed. The safe was blown open with dynamite and yielded a good haul for the bandits—how much the company would not divulge.

THERE was now a big price on Black Jack's head. This seemed only to nerve the bandit to more daring exploits. He swaggered in and out of Southwestern towns, with nobody daring to oppose him. Usually he was accompanied by his brother, Sam, and by other hard-riding, straight-shooting members of his gang. But no more stores and post offices and faro games were held up. Black Jack was after bigger game.

The bandit had picked the Colorado & Southern Railroad as his particular prey. Near Folsom, New Mexico, he held up two trains on that road. The robberies were close together in both time and location.

Both were successful, and yielded large amounts of money.

In most cases, Black Jack did not disturb the passengers. He went after the contents of the safe in the express car. Members of his gang, who were now expert in the work of train hold-ups, kept up a fusillade along the sides of the cars, merely to discourage interference from the passengers or train crew. After these hold-ups the gang retreated to the rough, wild country in the vicinity of the Cimarron, from which it seemed impossible to dislodge them.

Flushed with the success of his raids on the Colorado & Southern, Black Jack staged another hold-up near Folsom, at the very spot where one of the other robberies had taken place. The third hold-up was only five weeks after the second, and it so happened that the same conductor was in charge of the train. The conductor's name was Harrington. He was a modest, unassuming trainman, dark-eyed and kindly, and apparently not the sort who would put up a fight against the most desperate bandits the Southwest had known for years. Harrington knew that Black Jack would kill him on sight, for, in the course of the second hold-up, the bandit leader had asked who was in charge of the train.

"I'm going to get him someday," Black Jack had answered, on being told it was Harrington. "He made me walk thirty miles once," he added with an oath.

But Conductor Harrington was a man of real courage. He had armed himself with a sawed-off shotgun and he knew where he could find it readily.

When the third hold-up took place, Conductor Harrington's train was stopped less than a mile from the spot where Black Jack had carried on his operations five weeks before. Black Jack himself climbed on the engine, and, with a Winchester at the engineer's head, commanded that the train be run to the exact spot of the previous hold-up. The order was obeyed, and once more the train came to a stop.

The mail clerk, who had been wondering what was going on, put his head out of the door. Black Jack, who had just ordered the engineer to step out of the cab, was seemingly all eyes. He saw the mail clerk's head thrust from the door, and, apparently without taking aim, fired his deadly Winchester. The mail clerk fell back into the car, the bullet from Black Jack's rifle having shattered his jaw.

Conductor Harrington had hunted up his sawed-off shotgun when the train had first been stopped. Now, as it stopped again, he dropped off the baggage car. Black Jack had the engineer and express messenger at work uncoupling the engine from the express car. The bandit looked up as Conductor Harrington approached, and the two men fired almost simultaneously. They were not more than fifteen feet apart, and the charge from the conductor's shotgun struck Black Jack in the arm, shattering the bone at the elbow. Later the bandit admitted that the conductor had been a fraction of a second too quick for him.

"I had a bead on his heart," said Black Jack, "but his shot spoiled my aim and my bullet only cut his arm a little."

Black Jack, desperately wounded, made his way toward his horse. The gang had their best mounts in readiness near the scene of the hold-up. They had planned to have the engineer take the engine a mile or so down the road, leaving them to loot the express car and the mail car at their leisure. The knowledge that their leader had been wounded immediately threw panic into the outfit. The word was passed around among them that the train had guards "planted" on it. They could not believe that a trainman, fighting single-handed, had upset all their well laid plans.

The rest of the gang reached the horses and waited for Black Jack, who failed to appear. The bandit leader, faint from loss of blood, had fallen before he could reach the guarded horses. Sam Ketchum and some of the other bandits made a hurried but unavailing search for him; he had fallen, fainting, behind some rocks.

Hurriedly the gang swung into their saddles and rode away.

Conductor Harrington, after making certain that the bandits had gone, ordered the train crew to proceed to Clayton, to get a doctor for the mail clerk, who seemed to be bleeding to death but who eventually recovered.

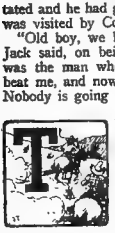
A posse was organized and was on the scene of the hold-up at dawn the next morning. There they found Black Jack, nearly dead from the loss of blood. He was taken to Folsom, where he was told that it would be necessary to amputate his arm.

Black Jack knew that the news spelled the end of his career, but he gave no sign of weakening. Faint though he was, he laughed in the faces of those about his cot. Only, as he laughed, his black eyes glowed with the hatred that was in him.

"Take it off quick," he said. "I'm a wolf for punishment."

After the bandit's arm had been amputated and he had gained some strength, he was visited by Conductor Harrington.

"Old boy, we had a fair fight," Black Jack said, on being told that his visitor was the man who had shot him. "You beat me, and now I've got to pay for it. Nobody is going to hear me squeal."



THROWN into consternation at the loss of their leader, the Black Jack gang, under Sam Ketchum, fled through the foothills of northern New Mexico, closely pursued by a large posse under Sheriff Ed Farr, of Walsenburg, Colorado. Sheriff Farr was a courageous officer, who welcomed a chance to come to grips with the men who had been terrorizing the Southwest.

After a chase of five days, the bandits were overtaken in Turkey Creek Canyon, where they were preparing a meal. The meeting was a double surprise, as neither the pursuing party nor the pursued had realized that they were so close together.

Without parley, the fight began. The bandits knew that it was to be a fight to the death. Both sides flung themselves behind rocks, and from these defenses a fight was kept up nearly all day.

Almost at the beginning of the fight, Sheriff Farr was killed. A little later two members of the posse were wounded. These losses did not discourage their comrades, who crept from rock to rock in the endeavor to hem in the bandits and prevent their escape. Late in the day Sam Ketchum received a wound from which he died two weeks later.

The wounding of Black Jack's brother discouraged the bandits, who had been getting the upper hand of the fight. In the gathering darkness, the remaining members of the gang, including George Franks, a notorious desperado, managed to make their escape.

Black Jack was hanged at Folsom, in April, 1901, maintaining his grim demeanor to the last. Up to the very hour of his hanging there were fears of a jail delivery. There had been threats against the life of Conductor Harrington also, and once his train was stopped just in time to avoid being wrecked by a rail which had been laid across the traicks. But most of the Black Jack gang had been too widely scattered to effect any rescue or any form of reorganization.

Some of them tried to "carry on" individually as train robbers and were killed one by one. Others joined the Hole-in-the Wall gang of bandits and train robbers which was then operating in Utah, Colorado, Nevada and Wyoming. Most of the members of this gang were killed, the others fleeing to South America.

Black Jack's philosophy had not worked out, either for himself or for others who tried to follow it. He and his outlaw fellows had gone after the "big things," in crime, but had paid the inevitable penalty.

THE CIMARRON CROSSING

AT INGALLS, Kansas, on the Santa Fe, there is a street running southward, and it crosses the Arkansas River on a low, long bridge. If one stands with one's back against the west side of that bridge, at its north end, and looks southwest across the shallow stream, one sees the Lower Cimarron Crossing of the Old Santa Fe Trail, where it forsook the Arkansas and struck out over the dreaded Dry Route to the Cimarron River. A few miles west of Ingalls the auto road turns abruptly north for a few yards to cross to the north side of the railroad tracks. Here, at the turn, on the south side, is a gap in a pasture fence closed by a single strand of wire. It is only a short distance south through that pasture to the cut bank of the Arkansas River, and here, bearing almost due south, is the old Upper Cimarron Crossing.

In line with the ford are a few patches of sand on the far southern ridge across the river, plainly to be seen against the now grass-covered hillsides; behind, to the north is the brown-marked trail pitching down the prairie ridge beyond the road and the railroad tracks. The sand patches to the south marked the point where the upper dry route trail crossed the ridge and lost sight of the river, to join the trail of the lower crossing a few miles beyond. Those who drive along that auto road, desperately eager to better the mileage of the day before, might profit by the few minutes needed to cross that pasture and stand on the north side of the famous Upper Cimarron Crossing.—C. E. M.

THE FEAST OF THE SEVEN WOMEN

By OSCAR SCHISGALL

Author of "The Jungle Convert"

Drought was bad enough, but when hostile natives added their menace the Crowleys almost were ready to give up their South American jungle plantation —almost, but in these Crowleys flowed the same pioneer blood that had settled the Western plains of America

HANDS rigidly clasped behind his back, Peter Crowley stood before the screened window and glowered out upon the sun-scorched fields. For many minutes he had not spoken; his surly gaze had wandered over the parched land on which acres of budding products were steadily being burned to death by the merciless tropic sun.

Mandioc, beans, lemons, peppers—all of them would perish for lack of water. And the ironic part of the impending catastrophe was that less than a quarter of a mile beyond those wilting fields ran the River Purus, offering drink as a desert offers a mirage to the thirst-crazed voyager. Crowley stared fixedly at the stream, his lips curling back in a sneer. Its surface was lazy and dazzlingly brilliant in the afternoon sun. On the far side the jungle wall, dark and impenetrable, bordered it; on the Crowley side, however, stretched vast pasturelands and promising fields.

Promising? A soft curse leaped from his lips. Perhaps they would yield their crops if they could be irrigated, but irrigation seemed a futile dream now. There was no one on the plantation to perform the task. As for rain, there would not, in all probability, be any for months, not until the wet season.

"Those dirty *caboclos!*" muttered Crowley savagely. "I might have known they'd quit as soon as real work was pushed before 'em. They're as sneaky as snakes, damn 'em all."

His wife glanced up. Seated at the rough, wooden table, she had been gazing vacantly at a wall, a cracked, bare wall as drab as this country into which they had come. His words roused her, and she sighed.

"Things will be all right, Peter," she murmured, with little conviction. "Don't worry too much. Maybe rain——"

"Rain! We won't see a drop of rain within the next few weeks, I tell you! By that time it won't matter. All we'll have on our hands will be acres of dead weeds."

"Dead weeds——"

Fortunately his back was toward her so that Peter Crowley did not see the expression of fear which sprang into his wife's taut features when she repeated his phrase. Fiercely she bit into her lips. Her hands, extended on the table, curled into small

fists. But she managed to conquer the temporary weakness, and her chin rose bravely.

"It won't be, Peter," she said doggedly. "It can't be. We mustn't let it happen."

"How're we going to stop it?" he challenged, still glaring through the window. "I can't dig a hundred canals mysel. in time to save the crops. And those damn' *caboclos*—I suppose they'll drift back when all the work is unnecessary."

In truth, Crowley was not to blame for cursing the *caboclos*, the native Brazilian halfbreeds who had come to toil on his plantation. Fifty of those little brown skinned men had agreed to help him raise his crops. Plowing had disgruntled them; must one labor so in the terrific heat, they had demanded? But Crowley had assured them that after the week of plowing their duties would be comparatively simple. So they had remained, collecting their wages, working rather steadily if not enthusiastically, until the seeds were planted.

Things had moved encouragingly for the American who was spending his first year in the tropics. Little patches of green began to appear upon the tilled ground, and with them grew thrilling visions of modest prosperity. When ripe, the products would be taken along the River Purus to the large town, Manaos, where they would bring good profits.

Such hopes had Peter Crowley cherished with his wife—before he saw, with horror, that there was not a hint of a thunderstorm to soak his fields. He had been told that he need not worry about water: the occasional rains would furnish plenty for his needs. But those rains had not come, and the planter decided, at a late moment, to irrigate his lands by digging narrow canals from the Purus into the fields.

An excellent plan, assuredly; one which must save the crops. It might have been enacted, too, had it not been for the *caboclos*. Those listless halfbreeds listened to the orders of the white master; they nodded, looked at one another dubiously. Dig canals? *Dio*, hot work for such weather! Crowley promised an increase in pay. He told the toilers to carry water in jugs from the river to the cultivated land while he went to Manaos and purchased shovels.

On the following day he returned from the town, his boat filled with the implements and his pockets emptied of funds. The instant he stepped ashore he perceived what had occurred.

The *caboclos*, shirking the labor of digging canals, had vanished. All of them, every man except faithful old Mutsu, the overseer.

NOW, as he stared through the window, viewing the first stages of devastation in his fields, he scowled. Hopelessness had gripped him and refused to relinquish its hold.

"I'm sorry," he snapped, "that we ever came to this place. We never made a worse mistake in our lives, Ethel. When we arrived, we had a few hundred dollars. What have we got now—now, after we've worked like slaves for months? What have we got out of it all, hey? Nothing! Not a damn' thing! Just a few patches of dying plants and a boatload of shovels." He laughed when he said that, a bitter, terrible laugh that sent another flash of terror into his wife's eyes. Then he turned away from the window and faced her.

"Let's get out," he said hoarsely. "We've had enough of this, more than enough. Heat that saps the life out of you, loneliness, pestilent insects, fever, everything with which man has ever been cursed! Let's get out, Ethel. Back to civilization. Back to America, where we can live decently. Back——"

Her queer stare stopped him. He was rather surprised to hear her voice flow as quietly and unruffled as ever.

"You mean to say, Peter, that you acknowledge defeat? You're ready to give up the fight?"

"Fight?" He jammed his hands into his pockets and strode about the room. Perspiration was dripping from his bronzed face. "What kind of a fight can we put up against this wilderness? It's got us beat from the start. Look what it did so far. Not a cent left and nothing to show for our work."

Ethel Crowley shook her head slowly, while a wan smile crept across her pale countenance.

"We'll have plenty to show for it if—if we ever sell the crops, if we can irrigate."

Peter snorted.

"'If!' Fine chance we have! I say we ought to get out of here."

But his wife, whose firm, soft tones had imbued Crowley with courage ever since he had come to the Brazilian tropics, replied steadily, "No, Peter. We'll stay. We're squatters—pioneers, not quitters."

"Pioneers, not quitters." The words

struck him with peculiar force. He frowned, moved back to the window. More morose than ever he gazed out in silence. Pioneers, not quitters—

A lean, rugged man was Peter Crowley, with short, brown hair and eyes as keen as they were gray. His shirt was splotched wherever perspiration had seeped through it, and it clung closely to a well molded figure. Khaki breeches were gathered into the tops of high boots—boots caked with dust and dirt. A vigorous man, obviously. He had found that vigor in the plains of Western United States. But, eyeing his desolate plantation, he forgot that far-away land where he had not appreciated the easily found happiness which had been his. He thought only of this broiling inferno where man had to struggle with a cruel environment merely to preserve his life.

He had said he wished to depart, to concede victory to the tropics. Yet he knew that he could not do it. In him, as in his wife, lay all the stubborn courage of the old pioneers. A Crowley had settled in California five years before the gold rush—and had stayed there. Another Crowley had gone to Wyoming when Wyoming was still hundreds of miles beyond the frontier of civilization—and he had stayed.

Ethel was right: they were pioneers, not quitters.

Yet, when he glanced at his wife, Peter sensed an ache within himself. There she sat at the table, a pale, thin little woman with black hair pulled down tightly along the sides of her head. That she suffered dreadfully because of the heat, he knew; that she had denied herself every suggestion of a luxury so that he might run the plantation, he also realized; even children, for which she had yearned so dreamily, she had not been given. It is better not to have children when one must labor incessantly to make a success of an enterprise such as she and her husband had undertaken; the plantation required more attention than any child.

Still, Ethel Crowley had never complained. Instead, she had retained a confident fire in her eyes and she had furnished ready encouragement whenever Peter's hopes began to droop, even as she was doing it now.

He shook his head. If only the *caboclos* had not deserted him! Alone, or with the assistance of Mutsu, it would be impossible to save the crops. He could not dig canals quickly enough; perhaps he could preserve an acre—one acre. As if that would repay him for the money and toil and soul he had poured into the plantation!

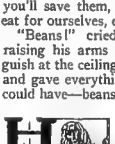
"How long do you think they'll live yet, Peter?"

He turned as his wife questioned him.

"A few days," he grumbled. "A few days at the most."

"Then," she advised unemotionally, philosophically, "I think you and Mutsu ought to dig a canal or two into the bean patch. You can manage that. At least, if you'll save them, we'll have something to eat for ourselves, even if we can't sell——"

"Beans!" cried Peter in desperation, raising his arms high and glaring in anguish at the ceiling. "Beans! We sweated and gave everything we owned so that we could have—beans to eat! Oh, good God!"



HE ENDED his tremulous plaint abruptly and stared at the door. Mutsu had entered, Mutsu, the native overseer. An aged creature, this faithful *caboclo*; his curly hair was already gray. Over his brown body he wore loose garments that appeared to have been fashioned from discarded sacks. Barefooted, bent, he paused in the doorway. Not the fact that he had entered amazed Peter Crowley, but rather the expression on his aquiline, emaciated face.

It was vibrant with fear. The fellow was battling to suppress a look of horror.

Crowley frowned at him.

"What is it, Mutsu?"

Mutsu, who had never forgotten that this white American had shot a jaguar when the brute was about to leap at the *caboclo's* throat—Mutsu gulped. He squirmed.

"Senhor — we — we better go 'way quick——"

"What's the matter?"

"We better go 'way, senhor—you and the senhora and me. Quick."

Impatiently Crowley raised his voice.

"Talk up, Mutsu? What's happened now? You look as if you saw a ghost or a jaguar or something worse."

"Something very, very worse, senhor. The Indians—they come near. Bad Indians."

Immediately Peter Crowley understood. Under his bronzed skin flowed sudden pallor. He looked at Ethel uneasily. Indians, bad Indians. What Mutsu meant was clear.

In settling upon the banks of the River

Purus the Americans had dared to penetrate the wilderness a little farther than their nearest neighbors. They had been forced to do so in order to obtain land. Here, on the brink of civilization, they were constantly in peril of being visited by interior tribes. Until now, by good fortune, they had never been troubled; indeed, a hostile face had never appeared out of the jungle.

Yet Crowley knew what tribes were reported to inhabit the interior: savages, head-hunters, untamed men of passion.

He coughed and rubbed a hand across his forehead.

"How do you know, Mutsu?"

"I see him, senhor—one bad Indian. I look across the river, and I see him there. He see me, too; he run into jungle."

Again Peter Crowley thrust his hands into his pockets and began pacing about the chamber. Another trouble, as though he had not suffered sufficiently already! Presently he halted and faced the old half-breed.

"What do you think they're doing around here, Mutsu?"

Mutsu hesitated. Uncertain, he eyed Ethel.

"I think maybe they get ready for the —the Feast of the Seven Women, senhor," he said finally, evidently having decided that he could speak before her.

The settler gaped. His wife moved forward on her chair and exclaimed,

"The—what?"

"The Feast of the Seven Women. You never hear of it, senhora?"

"N-no. What on earth is it?"

Once more Mutsu squirmed. Apparently a discussion of the thing was distasteful to him, yet he compelled himself to be lucid.

"A few year ago, white man he catch a bad Indian. Then he find out about the Feast of Seven Women. White man call it that. Bad Indians, they come together. They take the seven women of the tribe that have most man-children. They make them like queens. Then they go out and catch enemy woman—one woman from another tribe, see? They build big fire. The Seven Women burn the enemy woman to give to the god Zuruguru. See? Always, on the eleventh moon. It is the eleventh moon, senhora."

In awe the Crowleys listened to Mutsu's recital of the weird, symbolic rite. An enemy woman sacrificed to the god of the savages by the seven women who had borne the tribe most men-children.

"And—and you think they're going to do it now, Mutsu?"

In spite of himself, Peter's voice quivered as he asked the question. Mutsu nodded.

"Think so, senhor. We better get out quick. It is the eleventh moon. The Indians, they get wild. Better go 'way—you, the senhora, and me."

Peter Crowley manifested instant agreement.

"He's right, Ethel," he told his wife, in deep anxiety. "We'd better leave——"

As always, Ethel was calm and determined. She eyed him sternly.

"No, Peter, we can't leave. You've got to irrigate that patch of beans or we won't have even food. If we go away we lose every chance. We've got to stay."

"You heard what Mutsu said——"

"We may not be troubled. Besides, we have two guns in the house, and plenty of ammunition. Are you going to run away the moment we are threatened with physical danger?"

"But, Ethel——"

"The Indians probably have known for same time that we are here. They never bothered us. I don't think they'll do it now. They—they're afraid of whites, I believe. We've got to stay, Peter. You've got to save at least the beans. Otherwise——"

Queerly, in that moment Crowley recalled an anecdote concerning another Crowley, a Crowley who had held his ground on the Wyoming frontier against savages for years, until those very savages had recognized him as a friend. That Crowley had not run away when menaced; he had been a squatter, too; a pioneer, not a quitter. He—

"Well," whispered Peter, bending over his wife's chair, "if you're not afraid, Ethel——"

"Better start on the bean patch now, Peter," she answered calmly.

THE bean patch, which actually occupied almost twenty acres of level ground, lay a half mile from the house. It extended to the banks of the river, so that irrigation canals would not have to be very long. Yet it was useless to attempt watering the entire patch; such an effort would be too great for Crowley and his single, aged assistant. When he reached the spot,

shovel slung over his shoulder, he surveyed the ground thoughtfully. The most he could hope to accomplish was to irrigate sufficient territory to yield beans for his own use, his and Ethel's and Mutsu's.

He began to work immediately, digging toward the river from a point perhaps a hundred yards from the shore. Parallel to his ditch, Mutsu started another.

Despite the fact that the ground had been plowed not long ago, it was rock-hard. Baked by the scorching tropic sun, it was gray and dry and had to be chopped with the corner of the shovel as often as dug. Very slowly did the work proceed.

Crowley was soaked with perspiration. His tanned face shone as the sweat dripped from it. The drenched shirt revealed every muscle in his back and abdomen. Panting and determined, he toiled on, while the afternoon sun burned through him.

At times he would pause for a moment's rest, and his gaze wandered to the jungle across the shimmering river. He tried, too, to see the house, where Ethel was waiting, probably preparing the evening meal. A stony hill, however, rose between him and his home, and he could see nothing.

Behind him his plantation stretched for another hundred yards, where it terminated at the edge of a jungle growth similar to the one on the opposite side of the Purus. A narrow farm, this, but running far along the brink of the stream. Crowley had been unable to cultivate all the available land. He had taken a comparatively small area of the clear fields.

After a glance at Mutsu, who appeared to have emerged from a bath, Peter bent once more to his task. He worked hard and long, for more than two full hours, and his ditch was close to the river when —he stopped. Stopped and stared at Mutsu who had suddenly jerked up to an erect, stiff position, while terror convulsed his old features.

Both had heard the thing as it floated through the wilderness silence: a loud, piercing, prolonged scream. Peter's shovel fell from his hands. He swayed.

"It's—it's Ethel!" he gasped.

Mutsu was trembling. Excitedly he nodded.

"The senhora—the senhora! Maybe Indians——"

Panic caught Peter Crowley. He did not pause to contemplate the probable cause of Ethel's single scream. Impulsively he bounded toward the hill. Without waiting for old Mutsu, he dashed as rapidly as his muscular legs could carry him toward the house.

As he ran he yelled lustily, but ceased after a while when he felt that he could not afford to expend the breath. The sun was scorching; the distance was long; the task was arduous; yet Peter ran the whole half mile.

Behind him came the aged Mutsu, doing his utmost not to be outdistanced. When Mutsu reached the house, however, he encountered his master in the doorway. Wet, panting noisily, gasping with every breath, Peter sprang out of the doorway, two rifles across his arm. In his hand he held a belt of cartridges.

Ready to collapse with fatigue and heat, Mutsu began to splutter a queery.

"Look!" Crowley pointed to the river.

The *caboclo* obeyed. Close to the opposite shore skimmed a canoe. Two little brown men were paddling it. Propped between them and clearly visible against a background of jungle, sat a woman, apparently bound. She was moving, struggling.

That woman could be no one but Ethel.

"Indians!" hysterically cried Mutsu, forgetting his weariness. "They take senhora! They take her to be killed by the Seven Women!"

He felt a grasp upon his arm and was dragged wildly toward the river. Peter Crowley did not speak. His canoe was on the shore. Into it he pushed the halfbreed, sprang in himself, and started paddling. Never in his life had he forced more strength and energy and speed into each stroke.

He was peering at the Indian canoe, saw it run up on the bank. The brown men, he could see, were pulling Ethel out of the craft; they held her wrists, tugged at her, and vanished into the jungle. There must be a path there, Peter told himself desperately; he would plunge after them.

Heedless of his aching lungs, of the perspiration which oozed out of every pore, he paddled furiously.

"Take one rifle and the cartridges," he called to Mutsu. "You know how to load. If I have to shoot, you load one gun while I use the other. Stick close to me, Mutsu. We'll get her! We must get her!"

His canoe darted swiftly across the Purus, slashing the water and hurling back two converging lines. As he paddled, Peter Crowley succumbed to morbid stubbornness. The Jungle—the damned wilderness! It had taken everything—his money, his toil, his sweat; and now it was

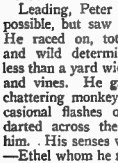
trying to take the only thing he still retained—his wife. Well, it wouldn't! Not unless it took him, too. He swore it to himself. He gnashed it out between quivering teeth: he wouldn't come back alive without Ethel!

Even before the canoe had scraped its breast upon the shore, Crowley had jumped to the bank. Old Mutsu followed him, holding the cartridge belt and one rifle. The other gun, loaded, hung in Peter's hand.

He glanced around for an instant, then leaped forward. Yes, there was a path, a narrow lane twisting into the dense growth. He lunged into it, Mutsu behind him. Recklessly they crashed over twigs and low bushes, trampling everything, thinking of nothing save that they must reach Ethel.

Leading, Peter peered ahead as far as possible, but saw no sign of the Indians. He raced on, tottering between despair and wild determination. The trail was less than a yard wide, and hemmed by trees and vines. He gave no attention to the chattering monkeys above him or the occasional flashes of vivid hues as birds darted across the patch, directly before him. His senses were focused upon Ethel—Ethel whom he must reach before it was too late.

And he did.



UNEXPECTEDLY he lurched out into a clearing, a large, circular field in the heart of the jungle. Its surface appeared to be of solid rock, for there was no sign of vegetation. What Peter Crowley saw as he emerged from the growth caused him to halt abruptly and to gape, his rifle raised.

Before him, in a dense group, stood perhaps two hundred little brown men and women. Most of them were absolutely naked, though a few wore loin-cloths. The men, who were no taller than four to five feet, carried spears much longer than themselves, and were grouped in a circle about one warrior who, apparently, was their chief.

He was no taller than the others. One distinguishing adornment did he wear, a necklace of white things which appeared to be stones. He carried no spear. Both his hands were raised high as he stood beside Ethel Crowley, who had been thrown to the ground before him. His ribs protruded; his hair rose like a mop of stiff cords. In hoarse, crackling tones he was chanting something.

Immediately behind him stood the seven women who were to celebrate the feast. Flabby, fat creatures they were, as ugly as they seemed unwholesome. Unconscious of their nudity, they listened to the chief's intonations.

Crowley's sudden appearance shattered the ceremony. The chief saw the white man, stared at him for a second. Then he emitted a loud yell, one of mingled rage and fear. He screamed to the Indians behind him. At once a dozen of them, spears lifted, started to rush toward the intruder.

Peter did not hesitate. He aimed his raised rifle at the nearest of the oncomers. A good shot, he felt confident of his accuracy. The bang resounded through the jungle. The short brown man sprawled headlong on the ground, motionless.

Those behind him stopped, recoiled. Even the chief was startled. He was staring not at Crowley, but at the gun.

In that moment of respite Peter exchanged rifles with Mutsu, who cowered behind him. Then he waited, ready to meet another attack.

The dazed second passed. Again the chief shrieked a command; again the warriors started forward; again Crowley aimed and fired.

This time, as a second little man toppled over, dead, the Indians completely stopped the charge and turned backward. They were afraid. Peter could see it. They feared this strange weapon of the white man, a stick which thundered and spat invisible death. It terrified them. Never had they seen a gun before, and they did not understand its power—nor the limits of its power. Like sheep, they huddled back together, withdrawing as far as possible from the instrument of destruction.

The seven ugly women changed grins for expressions of horror. Other women sought shelter behind the warriors. Only the chief remained where he had been, puzzled as much as he was terrified. He gazed at his two dead followers; then he gazed at the white man.

Peter Crowley, who had again taken a loaded rifle from Mutsu, comprehended his advantage. He had earned fear, which was next to respect. He could assume some authority, he felt. So he aimed his gun directly at the naked chief.

The Indian threw up his hands to shield himself. He dropped to his knees. He

yelled. Behind him two hundred voices joined his.

Peter did not shoot. Holding the rifle with one hand, he pointed to his wife and motioned that her bonds be cut. Vines had been used to tie her hands together, and she now sat facing her husband, ineffable joy and relief and faith in her countenance. The black chief might have understood the order, yet he did not act.

"Mutsu, you go forward and undo her," Crowley directed quietly. "I'll cover that fellow. If he moves toward you, I'll kill him. The others are too frightened to move. Go ahead, Mutsu."

Mutsu, who would have obeyed Crowley's command that he kill himself, placed the second rifle, loaded, upon the ground. Then he went forward, timidly but without stopping.

The chief did not look away from the muzzle directed at him. He must have comprehended the danger he was facing, for he did not move. Neither did the gun. Ethel was unbound, and she came back to her husband with Mutsu. A staunch woman, Ethel Crowley; she picked up the second gun and joined Peter in aiming it at the cowering, stupefied natives.

"We'll go along that path backward," said Peter firmly. "I'll cover them when they follow. The canoe is waiting. Come on."

Through the jungle path the natives did follow, the chief leading them. But Crowley, walking backward and led by Mutsu and his wife, never relinquished his aim. The Indians dared not approach closely.

When the white man's canoe started again across the Pursu, it was not followed. Two hundred brown skinned Indians, carrying spears and sweating in the late afternoon sunshine, lined the shore and gaped after the white man who had brought such mysterious and inescapable death into their midst.

THROUGHOUT that night Peter and Mutsu maintained an alert vigil. They sat outside the house, their rifles across their knees, and waited. Ethel, in response to her husband's insistence, had thrown herself upon her bed but found it impossible to sleep.

After a time the men went indoors; the mosquitoes outside were unbearable. Seated behind screened windows, they watched the river. At midnight, when the crescent moon hung high, they saw a crimson glow in the sky above the jungle.

"They make fire," said Mutsu softly.

"They're having their Feast of the Seven Women, I guess," grumbled Peter. To himself he added, "With another victim."

All night they were not molested. In the morning, within a half hour after dawn, they breakfasted, confident that the terror of the feast had passed. Peter waited until Mutsu had gone out. Then he leaned across the table.

"Ethel, I've had about enough of this life," he said. "I don't want to quit, but—but we're being driven to it. Your life isn't safe any more; neither is mine. The crops will go to waste. We'll have nothing. Let's get out."

Ethel lowered her gaze, fingered a bent spoon.

"Peter, I'm not afraid," she whispered, after a long pause. "Neither are you. Let's stick!"

"Stick—after last night?"

"This is the time to test ourselves—after last night. If we're quitters, we'll go. I don't think we ought to, Peter. Those Indians—well, they're afraid of your gun. They won't bother us, unless I'm greatly mistaken. You noticed they didn't follow us across the river."

"But, Ethel, what are we getting out of it all?"

"What did your grandfather get out of Wyoming?"

That query silenced him for a minute. In that minute Mutsu entered hastily, almost as excited as he had been the previous day.

"Indians!" he cried. "Indian chief—he come!"

Peter upset his chair as he sprang to his feet and snatched up his rifle. He darted to the door. There, surprised, he stopped and looked toward the Purus.

The little chief was really coming, accompanied by the two warriors who had paddled him across the stream. None of the natives was armed; all advanced from the bank with arms raised high, a sign of peace. Three practically naked brown dwarfs with hair like ropes and features that were strangely Mongolian, they came boldly toward the house.

Crowley, stepping forward with Mutsu at his side and Ethel behind him, lowered his gun.

The Indians paused, some ten feet away. Evidently they were still uneasy in the presence of the white man's weapon. Knowing he would not be understood,

Peter nevertheless uttered a question; the tone of his voice, its inflection, ought to carry a message.

Immediately the thin, bony chief pointed to the rifle; then he pointed to himself. Crowley frowned, puzzled, and the Indian made his desires more clear. He took off the necklace he was wearing; now the white man recognized those white stones. They were teeth, the teeth, doubtless, of a beast at least as large as a jaguar. In a significant manner the native extended the treasure as he might have offered a gift; again he pointed to the gun and to himself, meanwhile chattering volubly.

Mutsu was first to grasp his intent. He touched Crowley's arm.

"He say, senhor, he like gun for himself. He change with you. He give you necklace, you give him gun."

Peter nodded.

"Fine chance he has of getting a gun from me," he muttered to Ethel. Aloud he exclaimed, "No!" and shook his head vigorously.

An expression of such utter dismay creased the slant-eyed brown face that Peter, had the occasion been less perilous, would have smiled. A rapid discussion ensued between the savage chief and his two aides. After a few seconds the little man again proffered his necklace of jaguar-teeth beads and wailed a plaint which stirred Crowley strangely.

"He seems to want the gun pretty badly," he mumbled.

"It must appear superhuman to him," ventured Ethel.

"But I won't give it——"

The chief was performing queer antics now. Gesticulating wildly, he pointed to himself and to his companions, then swept his arms toward the distant lands beyond the jungle. After that behavior, he motioned once more to the rifle.

As before, Mutsu understood the meaning of the movements.

"He say, senhor, you give him the gun, and he take his people far away where they don't bother you. He want gun pretty damn' bad, senhor."

"So I see."

Crowley gazed down at the rifle in his hands. By surrendering it, he could purchase peace. And he still possessed another gun. For some time he considered the offer; his eyes wandered over his dying, sun-baked fields. Truly, his troubles were sufficiently weighty without adding to them the burden of the black man's enmity. If peace could be bought—

Suddenly he straightened. A peculiar flame entered his eyes. He looked at Ethel, at Mutsu, at the Indians. His mind, working quickly, surveyed the inspiration which had sprung into it. Yes, an undeniable inspiration. The old chief obviously wanted the gun more than anything else; perhaps—perhaps he would be willing to exchange service for it!

"Mutsu," exclaimed Peter Crowley, his voice unexpectedly vibrant with hope, "Mutsu, get a shovel—quick!"

Perplexed, yet obedient, Mutsu hurried away. Ethel whispered a question, but Peter merely shook his head. He keenly watched the three savages who still chattered before him.

When the aged *caboclo* returned with his shovel, the Indians impetuously darted backward. Another white man's weapon! Another inflicter of death!

Peter's shout reassured them; they paused, quivering, wild eyed, uncertain.

"Mutsu," directed Crowley, "start digging here toward the river. Go on!"

To the aged overseer, his master's plan was a mystery, but he began to enact it. Perspiring after a minute's labor, he began digging a ditch. The Indians watched him, curiously.

Then Peter Crowley spoke to them, with his hands and with his voice. He pointed to the ditch, moved his finger to indicate a long canal to the river. Ten feet from it he repeated the gesture; then he waved his arm to signify the whole plantation.

His message was concise, unmistakable: he desired such ditches as Mutsu was digging to be distributed over the cultivated acres. When he felt that he had expressed himself with sufficient clearness, he pointed at the chief and his two followers. They were to do the digging! They and the other members of their tribe.

Peter extended the rifle toward the chief.

"Do this," his mute message said, "and the gun is yours."

Through this series of motions he went a second time—and saw, while his heart thumped with incipient hope, that the naked little man actually comprehended.

Peter waited while the chief chattered to his men; he saw the Indian nod, ogle the rifle. Palpably, the savage was filled with excitement. He was unable to stand still; from foot to foot he shifted his weight, until he appeared to be dancing. His arms waved, the jaguar-tooth necklace pendant from one hand.

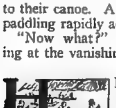
Ethel, too, had caught her husband's

idea. Stirred as much as the chief, she waited anxiously. Her lips moved, but she said nothing—as though she were murmuring an inaudible prayer. The crops might yet be saved—

With startling abruptness the savage chieftain emitted a yell. It was a harsh sound; still it was not inimical. Rather, it was a promise, reassuring in its very ugliness.

The three black men turned, raced down to their canoe. A moment later they were paddling rapidly across the Purus.

"Now what?" muttered Peter, squinting at the vanishing craft.



HE DID not learn what was occurring until fully two hours later. Then he saw something which sent him to his window with a loaded rifle, with a heart that thundered, with anxiety deeply creasing his sun-tanned countenance. Behind him Ethel gasped, gaped, stifled a scream. Old Mutsu hastened toward the cartridge belt.

Along the River Purus, moving toward the plantation, came an armada of at least fifty canoes, each little boat bearing two paddlers. Brown skinned, naked paddlers. Over the sides protruded the gleaming, pointed heads of spears—a hundred spears.

"They—they're attacking, Peter!" whispered Ethel Crowley.

Peter did not speak. Pale, grim, he waited, his rifle aimed at the advancing horde.

He watched them leap to the shore, a hundred armed savages. In their lead he discerned the bony chief, distinguished by the weird necklace again thrown around his neck. The warriors walked up the slope, their leader howling raucous commands.

Peter aimed. He would wait until they were within fifty yards of him.

But those savages never came within fifty yards of the house. In response to a shout emitted by the little chief, they suddenly dispersed along the cultivated land, a hundred naked brown men running wildly with lifted spears. They rushed to the right and to the left, but not toward the house. Crowley stared, amazed, stunned.

He saw the Indians stop, heard the chief's voice again. An instant later he saw the long spears driven into the ground, breaking the hard, gray soil like picks. Half the savages were engaged in this labor, while the others fell to their knees and dug the broken earth with their hands.

Stupefied, Peter Crowley realized that these apparently uncivilized little creatures were not trampling upon the green heads that had sprouted out of the ground; neither were they digging those burgeoning roots out of the soil. They were making canals to the river—and making them, without shovels, as efficiently as white men could have done it!

What Brazilian explorers had long ago discovered, Crowley learned in that moment: the savages of the interior are excellent agriculturists. Forced to support themselves in the wilderness, they have learned many ways of raising crops. Irrigation is an old expedient of combatting nature for those people. Crude in their methods, they nevertheless achieve results.

Now they were exchanging their knowledge and their toil so that their chief might obtain a white man's rifle.

"Good Heavens!" tensely, quietly whispered Ethel as she peered over her husband's shoulder through the window "They—they're doing it! A hundred men can finish the job in a day, Peter. The crops—Peter, the crops won't die!"

Peter could only nod. His eyes were misty, filled with wonder. For a rifle, an ordinary rifle which could be given without bullets, for a rifle he was rescuing himself and his wife from destruction. Yes, it would have been destruction. All their earthly possessions were planted in that dry soil.

He thought, of a sudden, of the Crowley in Wyoming who had remained on his settlement until he had made friends of hostile Indians.

"We're squatters, pioneers, not quitters!" Peter murmured, with apparent irrelevance.

Outside the Brazilian savages labored enthusiastically in his fields of mandioc and peppers and beans and maize.

Schisgall Again!

WHITE WARRIORS

A South American Novelette, will appear in an Early Issue

SAN FRANCISCO

BEGINNINGS OF OUR TOWNS

By Eugene Cunningham

Endorsed by the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce

IT WOULD seem that no Spaniard, save Padre Junípero Serra, ever appreciated the strategical importance of the magnificent Bay of San Francisco. Don Gaspar de Portolá discovered it in 1769 while on a northern march in search of the "lost" Bay of Monterey. But Portolá believed it to be that unimportant harbor known both to Spanish explorers and to Sir Francis Drake, marked on Spanish maps as San Francisco Bay. So Portolá dismissed it contemptuously, pausing only to rechristen it after the patron-saint of the expedition. That is, in effect he acknowledged: "This is San Francisco Bay."

Father Serra, devout Franciscan, practical dreamer, enthusiastic pioneer, could not rest until a mission should be established on the bay bearing the sacred name of his order's founder, St. Francis of Assisi. His many importunities went unheeded until the year 1775, when Felipe de Neve, third Spanish Governor of California, sent Juan de Ayala, Lieutenant of Frigate, Royal Navy, to survey the bay. So de Ayala is the first white man known to have sailed through the Golden Gate—which, incidentally, got its name from Fremont the Pathfinder, years later.

In 1776 came Captain Anza's expedition: soldiers and settlers. But no town, in the real sense of the word, would be founded for nearly sixty years.

The beginning of the American, the real San Francisco, followed logically the coming to the Californian coast of New England ships. These brought goods to barter for hides and tallow. There were enormous profits in this trade. Eastern firms established agents in California and independent traders were quick to follow. Agent and independent alike married into Californian families, to render themselves "*simpático*" with the natives. Now Governor Figueroa dreamed of a town on the harbor's shore. To William A. Richardson, Englishman and naturalized Californian, Figueroa offered in 1835 the captaincy of the port, if he would settle on Yerba Buena Cove.

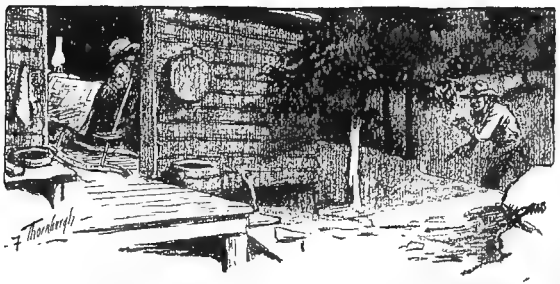
Richardson saw the possibilities of such a town. He moved immediately from his home near San Gabriel Mission. Hardly was his house built on Yerba Buena's single surveyed street—*La Calle de Fundación*—when Jacob P. Leese, an energetic American trader, built his large frame house near by.

Rosalía, daughter of Jacob Leese and Vallejo's sister, was the first white child born in the future San Francisco. Yerba Buena grew slowly but steadily. When on July 8, 1846, Captain Montgomery, with seventy sailors and marines from the *U. S. S. Portsmouth* raised the Stars and Stripes in the Plaza, the pueblo had two hundred inhabitants—Americans, Englishmen, and Hudson's Bay men mostly.

"San Francisco" was known the world over as the name of the magnificent harbor. It occurred to several large landholders of the north—General Vallejo, Dr. Semple, Thomas Larkin the one-time American Consul—who had much confidence in California's future, that a town named San Francisco would naturally "own" the Bay. So in 1847 they planned such a town. But Lieutant Washington A. Bartlett of the *Portsmouth*, first American *alcalde*, acted with military promptness: Sam Brannan, the Mormon, had established the *California Star* newspaper. In the *Star* Bartlett published his ordinance, rechristening Yerba Buena "San Francisco." Vallejo, Semple and Larkin protested, but to no avail.

Little more of lazy, Mexican quiet remained to San Francisco, the peaceful, prosperous village of quiet merchants clustered just above the waterfront. Its citizens were leisurely, but surely, amassing fortunes; ships came in from the Atlantic coast; there were dances and other entertainments of a quiet sort. The pueblo was governed by *alcalde* and *ayuntamiento*—the six-men council; well-governed, too. There was a school. The town's only great vice was gambling. The citizens looked forward to continuance of this established order.

But with the discovery of gold; with that second, greater, discovery—of the amazing fertility of California, San Francisco burst its swaddling-clothes overnight. Destined to become one of the greatest cities of the United States, she held in her by virtue of name and location, on that day of Bartlett's canny rechristening, all the potentialities since developed. That was the day of San Francisco's real beginning, in more than name alone!



THE KILLING OF SAM BLAKEMAN

By FRED HUNT

Self-defense the killer called it, but Dad Streeter knew his friend had been murdered; and when the law would not listen to him the old gunfighter took up the case himself—beginning with a thorough oiling of his single-action .45

OLD DAD STREETER, rearing back in his hickory seated rocking chair with his long-heeled boots cocked upon the table amongst unwashed breakfast dishes and the morning light streaming in over his left shoulder from the open door, for the third time slowly read through the *Star's* account of the killing of Sam Blakeman. Finishing, he carefully folded the paper and placed it alongside his feet, and then knocked the ashes, long since cold, from his pipe.

"It's a damned lie!" he muttered half aloud as he refilled his pipe and mechanically tamped the tobacco home. "Self-defense, eh? Cold-blooded murder, I call it."

He hauled in one long gangling leg, ran a match over the sole of its ornate boot, uncoiled the leg again, and, expertly shielding the flame with his gnarled sinewy fingers, relighted his pipe. Then, easing back to a comfortable angle of about forty-five degrees, so that his eyes rested on a point directly above the cluttered table, he began running over in his mind the shooting of the previous night, little clouds of white smoke drifting out now and then from under his tawny drooping mustache.

Dad was so thin that the sun shone on both sides of him, it was said, and therefore he could not cast a shadow; he stood something over six feet in his stockings, although none had ever seen him without his fancy boots on, which added at least two inches to his height. He was straight as an Indian, and the only thing he knew about doctors was what he had read. Ex-scout, ex-sheriff, ex-ranger, ex-cowman, he now lived on the outskirts of the big border town, hatched in two rooms, read four papers daily and six magazines monthly, smoked his pipe, talked politics, and kept a discreet silence about the old days. He had money in the bank, while his sons had be-cattled sections in the Panhandle and children in the State university.

Deliberately the old Texan analyzed the story of the killing, took it apart, and from the pieces formulated what he believed to be the truth. He created his tale as he had trailed Apaches in the long ago, by a series of hunches based on bits of evidence observed only by himself rather than on sheer reasoning. But his conviction was none the less absolute.

The newspaper gave a straightforward and believable narrative of the shooting. In brief, Sam Blakeman, Federal prohibition agent, met Jed Collins and Jim Bailey, ex-members of the enforcement organization, on a secluded street; picked a quarrel with Collins, drew first, fired first, and was then killed instantly when Collins got his automatic working. Blakeman's shot caught Collins in the hand and took off a couple of fingers. There were no other witnesses than Collins and Bailey.

To the lay reader and to the county attorney, the story looked credible enough. Collins had given himself up, had waived preliminary hearing, and had been bound over to the grand jury on charges of murder as a matter of form. It was taken for granted that he would come clear on a plea of self-defense in a brief trial.

But Old Dad Streeter knew some things that the lay reader and the young county attorney did not know. In the first place, Sam Blakeman had been his friend—they had fought Mexican bandits together along the Rio Grande. Another thing, Blakeman was not the man to pick a quarrel. Still another, he had been instrumental in "getting the jobs" of some half dozen prohibition men, Bailey and Collins included, by showing Washington that they were crooked through and through. Still another, they had boasted in certain quarters that Blakeman would "get his." And most of all—at a distance of ten feet, at which the shooting took place, with an even break Blakeman would have put at least two bullets into Collins's heart before the latter got his gun out, in place of merely clipping him in one hand. Streeter himself had taught Blakeman how to shoot.

There was one other thing that looked mighty peculiar to the old borderman. All of the five bullets that entered Blakeman's body had hit him in the left side. That was something else that Streeter had taught him in younger years: to stand sideways to his opponent so that only his right side would be exposed to gunfire. Blakeman had been in shooting scrapes so many times in his twenty years as a peace officer that this was second nature to him. All in all, the account looked mighty queer to Old Dad Streeter.

After an hour's smoking the ancient gunman unravelled his attenuated figure, rose to his booted feet, got his wide-brimmed sombrero from its customary peg, buckled his old forty-five around his slim waist, and started out for the county courthouse. As a matter of fact, every time he stepped out on the street with his shooting iron bulging out on his hip he broke the laws of the sovereign State of Texas, for he held no permit to carry arms. Yet, a police officer, a deputy sheriff, or for that matter a state ranger, would no more think of taking official cognizance of this flagrant violation of the law than would a young second lieutenant think of calling to the attention of a major-general the fact that he needed a shave.

With kindly, though strained, tolerance the young county attorney listened to Streeter's version of the shooting, but at the conclusion only smiled in a patronizing manner and pointed to the fact that Collins had confessed to the shooting, and that the State's hands were tied for further action because of the lack of witnesses. The older man, when the attorney signified that the interview was to be considered at an end, rose to his full height, jammed his big white hat down on his graying hair, spat contemptuously out of the window, looked rather pityingly at the younger man for a moment, then turned on his heel and strode out of the office.

The reception he got from Sheriff Tomilson, an old friend and wise in the ways of shooting men, was much more sympathetic; but it yielded no more, for the sheriff pointed out that the prosecution was solely in the hands of the county attorney and that he himself was powerless.

"But, by God, Dad, I believe you've got the thing doped out about right, and if I ever see a loophole to do anything about it, I'll sure'n hell do it," whispered Tomilson as Streeter walked out of his inner office.

THE rest of the morning and all through the afternoon Dad Streeter sat in his hickory seated chair staring up into space and smoking innumerable pipes of strong tobacco. Oft and again he was at the point of reaching a conclusion, only to have the mature judgment of years squash it. His memory harked back to the days when Texas law was largely a matter of personal preference, when the six-gun handed down more verdicts than did twelve good men and true. His final decision was reached only after long deliberation and much travail, not with the precipitate swiftness of

younger years. But his mind, once made up, he was none the slower to action.

It was not until he had eggs and bacon already sizzling in the skillet that he noticed that he had failed to wash dishes during the day. While his supper lost much of its savoriness as it cooled on the table, he scoured off a plate and knife and fork, just enough to serve for immediate use. He ate hurriedly, pushed the egg-bespattered dishes back to the center of the table, and went about the business in hand.

Through the use of a red flannel union suit, blue shirt, coat, pants and boots, and many pillows and cushions and towels for stuffing purposes, he constructed a thing that bore some similarity to a human form. He made the head from a pillow-case filled with rags and jammed it down on the narrow shoulders of the dummy. Adjusting an old flappy sombrero on the head, he placed the figure in a reclining posture in his only rocking chair, with its back to the door, and cocked the boots up on the table. Then he went out into the night and from his front gate, about ten paces from the opened door, surveyed his handiwork. It took but one glance to show that it would never do; anybody with half an eye could see that the thing sitting there was not Dad Streeter.

He went back to the house and slowly took the dummy to pieces. A short while later he was tossing in his sleepless bunk. The next day he builded on a firmer foundation; I. Goldstein, of Goldstein's Men's Furnishing Store, had given him—with unsuppressed curiosity—the temporary use of one of the wax models which were wont to stand behind the plate-glass show window attired in the snappiest fall suits. Dressing this up in his own clothing, the old Texan formed what might have been taken for a double of himself under favorable circumstances.

With infinite care he placed it in the old rickety chair, with its back to the door, settled the wide-brimmed hat down on the head so that both head and neck were hidden when viewed from the rear, drooped the head over on one shoulder as if it had nodded off to sleep, and placed an opened newspaper over the knees. From his front gate he viewed his latest creation with satisfaction, and a chuckle escaped his lips.

Then, getting paper and pencil, he scrawled out the following note:

Jim Bailey—

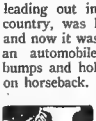
I saw the shooting of Sam Blakeman from a distance of less than fifty feet, and you are a yellow-livered murderer. I ain't going to the grand jury, but I am going to kill you on sight. Beginning tomorrow morning you had better keep clear of me.

Streeter.

A messenger boy handed this note to Jim Bailey as he sat in a soft drink stand, loafing with several others of his ilk. He read it, turned a little white around the mouth, crumpled it up and rammed it down in his coat pocket, but said nothing to his companions.

After supper that evening Old Dad Streeter placed his kerosene lamp so that its dim light played but faintly on the limp figure of the dummy sitting by the door, buckled on his gun, took his pipe, tobacco, and matches, and went out into the moonlit Southern night. As he reached the front gate he turned and took one long and searching look at the model, smiled grimly to himself, and went across the road to the dilapidated frame house, long since deserted, the only building within a quarter of a mile from his home. He entered the old run-down dwelling through the open front door, climbed up the creaking stairway to the second floor, and squatted down on a pine box near the front wall. Peering through the side of the house where a weather board was missing, he could make out the vague outlines of the dummy across the road.

Lighting his pipe, he waited while the big open-faced watch in his vest pocket ticked off the noisy seconds. The road, leading out into an arid section of the country, was little traveled at any time, and now it was practically deserted. Twice an automobile chugged past over the bumps and hollows. Later a man passed on horseback.



IT WAS yet an hour or more before midnight when his ancient ears caught the sound that he had been waiting for, and he pressed his eyes to the crack in the wall. He heard footsteps; there, coming at a fast walk along the dusty road, he made out the figure of a man in the moonlight. The Old Texan's hand strolled down to the butt of his big forty-five and loosened it in the holster. He waited with eyes and ears tense and straining.

The lonely pedestrian slowed down

when a hundred feet from Streeter's front gate, hesitated, then stopped and listened. The heart of the old man beat a little faster. The nocturnal visitor advanced a bit, stopped again, listened a minute, and then stole on, alert and cautious. A few feet from the gate he stopped again and remained motionless for some seconds. Streeter's steady gray eyes now told him that he was looking at Jim Bailey, even made out a gun in the fellow's right hand. Streeter thought that Bailey could now see the figure in the door, and the former man-hunter waited in tense expectation.

Slowly, stealthily, Bailey crept up to the gate, step at a time. Noiselessly he opened the gate, entered the yard, and noiselessly closed it. Stooping to a half crouching position, he stole, inch at a time, up toward the shack. Dad Streeter's hand clutched convulsively at the hard butt of his heavy Colt, but did not draw it from its holster.

It was not until he was within five paces of the still figure sitting in the door of the shack that Bailey came to a stop and straightened up. Streeter saw the gun arm come up to a level with Bailey's eyes and remain steady an instant.

With the sharp staccato of a pneumatic hammer, the automatic shattered the stillness of the night. The Old Texan tried vainly to estimate the number of shots loosed. The echoes were still reverberating on the night air when Bailey vaulted the low fence, broke into a run down the road away from town, and disappeared in a shadowy whirl of dust. It was mighty hard for Streeter to keep from sending a salvo after him to hasten him on his way.

Some minutes later Dad Streeter climbed down from his perch, strode across the street to his home and entered. Three bullets had passed through the back of the dummy; one had buried itself in the edge of the table, and another was found in the rear wall.

"I reckon I was right," chuckled the aged gun-fighter to himself as he blew out his light and crawled into his bunk.

Streeter rose earlier than usual the following morning, and again he had to wash dishes before he could eat. His breakfast soon completed, he got a small bottle of lubricating oil—the best on the market for guns—a cleaning rod and a handful of old rags. Then he took his cartridge belt, holster, and gun from their customary place at the head of his bunk and placed them in a little cleared spot on the table.

With the loving carefulness of a young mother lifting her first-born from its downy crib, Old Dad Streeter drew the big Colt from its carved Mexican holster, removed the shells one by one and tossed them out through the window. Then, with meticulous precision, he cleaned the revolver inside and out, ran oiled rags through the barrel until its glistened like the sun reflected from a mirror, rubbed the exterior until it shined like burnished silver.

A single-action .45 army model it was, with a death-dealing five and a half inch barrel. The metal trappings were of richly wrought silver; the stocks of hand carved ivory. On the butt was the engraved inscription—"Presented to Dad Streeter, retiring President of the Lone Star Peace Officers' Ass'n, by the Boys," and the date.

It was only after some investigation and deliberation that the "boys" had decided on this particular model for the old Texan. They all knew that he, as most old-time frontiersmen, had no use for any gun other than the old reliable single-action army Colt; but it was only after discreet questioning that they learned from him that the seven and half inch barrel was too long for fast work, that the four and three-quarters was too short for accuracy, and that in his estimation all calibers other than the forty-five were merely toy guns.

There were no notches on the ivory stock; Dad Streeter had no desire to remember some of the things he had been forced to do.

The better part of two hours, enough time to clean a dozen guns, he spent on the revolver before he put away his oil and rags and rod. Breaking open a new box of cartridges, he shoved five fresh, bright, shining ones into the cylinder. It held six, but he always carried the hammer resting on an empty chamber.

At length he finished and returned the gun to its fancy carved holster, a piece of art in itself. It was one of those models which long experience had proved the best for fast work: with only the barrel inserted, and the butt, hammer, and trigger guard all exposed to view. When the belt was loosely buckled around the old man's wasp-like waist, the butt of the gun hung low on his right leg, about where his hand dangled from the end of his long, thin arm. Just what fraction of a second it took Old Dad Streeter to draw the gun from its holster and get it into action was not known. The few men who had attempted to match this speed in the dozen years he had owned the gun were unable to testify. Some time later in the morti-

ing, from the telephone of his nearest neighbor, Streeter got Sheriff Tomilson on the wire.

"Kinda hang around that soft drink stand down on the corner of Washington Avenue and Tenth Street, Sheriff, 'specially along toward three o'clock this afternoon. You might have a chance to—er—make an arrest."

"All righty, Dad, I'll be there. Better be sorta careful, Dad," the sheriff's voice drifted back.

SHERIFF TOMILSON was there, playing dominoes with one of his deputies that afternoon when Old Dad Streeter sauntered in. Jim Bailey was also there—as the old man had figured—with his back to the door, sipping a cold drink and chatting idly with the man behind what had once been one of the most famous bars in the Southwest.

Streeter saw Bailey and then turned his eyes to the sheriff, who had looked up when the old man entered.

"Hello, Dad," greeted the sheriff, rather loudly and distinctly.

Before the old Texan could respond Bailey turned around like a flash and looked straight into the eyes of Dad Streeter. He held his glass rigidly in his right hand; his left gripped the bar, and he stood motionless, as if suddenly turned into stone. His lips quivered a trifle and the color fled from his face.

"Mr. Bailey, eh?" Streeter's slow, calculating words broke the ghastly stillness that pervaded the barroom, and the corners of his mouth curled slightly under his long walrus-like mustache.

Bailey slowly, tremblingly, began to lower the glass. When it reached the level of his right hip his arm hesitated; his fingers relaxed spasmodically; the glass dropped to the floor and was shattered into bits. Bailey's right hand streaked under his coat-tail and came back with an automatic crashing.

Something roared at Old Dad Streeter's side. Bailey slumped to his knees; his automatic clattered across the floor; his left hand was flung across his eyes as a shield and his right hand fumbled at his breast. For a full twenty seconds an eerie silence filled the big room, while Bailey's lips, a sickly white, twitched convulsively.

"Don't shoot—I'm dying!" he at length gasped, his eyes so extended that it seemed almost possible to knock them off with a stick.

"Who killed Sam Blakeman?" Dad Streeter's words cracked like a blacksnake whip.

"I sh—shot him in the—back while he was talkin' to Collins. My God—don't shoot!" whimpered Bailey, and then pitched forward on his face.

Men sprang to the prostrate figure and Old Dad Streeter calmly handed his gun to Sheriff Tomilson.

Rough hands turned the prone form over on its back, nervously wrenched off collar and tie, and tore open the shirt. Desperately they worked at his clothing for at least a minute before the whole torso was exposed.

Then Old Bud Davis, ex-cowman, rose from the little clump of men, and spat expressively and copiously on the floor.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he blurted out. "Ain't touched!"

A more detailed examination showed that the bullet from Streeter's gun had splintered the bar a couple of feet above the rail; that Bailey was still breathing and had not even been grazed by the shot. While these two facts were gradually soaking into the others Streeter made a personal and thorough inspection of Bailey's right hand and forearm, and then took a close look at the automatic.

"Missed! Missed, fair and square," he muttered half aloud.

On the way to the court-house, after Bailey had come out of his funk and had been taken in hand by a deputy sheriff, Tomilson asked of Old Dad Streeter in a low confidential voice, "Say, Dad, how did you miss a man at less'n ten paces?"

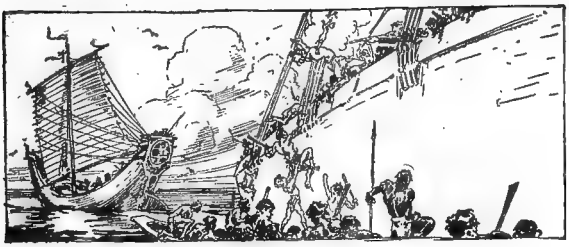
"Wasn't shootin' at a man," responded the old Texan.

"Well, what in the devil were you shootin' at?"

"His gun, Sheriff—and missed fair and square. I was a leetle rushed. Didn't look for him to get his gun out so fast. If he hadn't lost his nerve he'd likely have killed me. But I knew he didn't have no guts, anyway."

ON THE TRAIL OF SINDBAD THE SAILOR

by Talbot Mundy *(Next month's article)*



THE SEA GYPSY

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

"Don't forget Walker, Avery, and Crewe!" adjured the dying John Armod. And his son remembered—remembered and followed the vengeance trail though it led around the world, from the Mexican ranch to the far ports of the South Seas

I

A SEAFARING race were the Armods, mighty warriors and adventurers from the days of the Vikings to the more prosaic days of trading—with a bit of smuggling and privateering to keep the blood stirring. It was John Armod who went round the Horn into the Pacific and garnered much gold from the sandalwood trading. Afterward he turned pirate and it was while fleeing from a lean frigate, laden with loot and liquor, that he went ashore off the coast of Mexico.

Thereafter he disappeared from the face of the sea and for twenty years or more the name of Armod was missing from the muster roll of ships. Instead John Armod was lord over a great ranch, fifty miles inland, nesting between warm hills and stretching from skyline to skyline. With him John Armod had the English girl he had taken from a lonely station in Samoa and with whom he afterward fell in love and married. It was from this marriage that John Armod the second sprang.

The first thing he could remember was the immense rambling structure of a ranch-house, the dark-faced smiling peons and the milling of cattle over dusty ground. His mother died when he was small, so he did not recall much of her; but his father was always an idol, a big, broad man with yellow hair and gray eyes, shouting commands in a bull voice and laughing great laughs.

He remembered always that his father wore outland clothes, high, soft-leather boots, sashes of colored silk, immense straw hats. And around the walls of certain rooms strange things were hung, sawfish blades, grass mats of outland make, devil-devil masks from queer tribes, swords, necklaces of sharks'-teeth, spears; and on little tables were fragments of pink and white coral, immense mother-of-pearl shells, tiny mats made with silk-like rope, models of ships. These rooms never seemed to lose a certain tarry, clean smell.

When John Armod was five he remembered his father teaching him to splice rope. He remembered it chiefly because the hard strands hurt his little fingers, made them sore and made him cry.

"You'll need to know some day, son," his father would then boom. "You'll go to sea as surely as the birds fly north in the spring; an Armod always goes to sea."

So young John learned to splice, and with the aid of a set-up wheel he learned how to steer, after a fashion. Once his father took him to the coast and gave him lessons in a boat. He enjoyed those few

weeks more than any other time he could think of. Of course he also learned to ride lean, savage-mouthed horses, to herd cattle, to dance the quaint Mexican dances. He learned how to shoot, and when he was ten he could hit a playing-card at twenty paces with a little revolver his father had given him. But it was driven into him, he came to regard it as his religion, that he would one day be a sailor.

Then all the future was blotted and all teaching went by the board on the night the three strange men came to the ranch. Little John Armod listened outside the main door of the great living-room. The strangers wore queer clothes, dark, hot-looking things. They swore strange oaths, swayed when they walked. There was much drinking in the living-room and much talking. John Armod could tell his father was getting angry by the sudden change in tone.

"Well, we c'n save you a lot of trouble," he heard one of the men say.

"I remember you now," the elder John Armod shouted, banging his great fist on the table. "You're the three men who deserted me in Samoa. Boys then, weren't you? I won't pay a damned thing!"

The men went away then, laughing harshly. John Armod sat up for a long time, drinking steadily and cursing under his breath. Little Armod crept to bed and wondered and presently fell asleep.

After midnight he was awakened by boots stamping across the veranda. Loud voices filled the house. He heard his father swear and shout something. Then silence fell.

"We'll take ten thousand for now," a drawling voice finally answered.

"Brought back the whole crew, eh?" John Armod thundered. "I'll see you get yours, Walker."

Slipping from his bed, John Armod, Jr., went down the cool passageway and peeped in through the door of the great living-room. He saw his father fumbling with the lock of a massive chest that always stood in a dark corner. Behind the elder Armod grouped three men, all smiling, two of them fingering revolvers. They were sailors beyond doubt, young men, tall and strong. Behind them again, outside on the veranda, other men were grouped, also sailors, some of them wearing cutlasses, all carrying guns.

John Armod swung round from the chest at last and held out a thick bundle of bank-notes.

"Here you are!" he boomed, sneeringly. "And I don't pay another damned thing. Next time my peons will be ready and I'll fight."

The man who had taken the banknotes shrugged and laughed as he counted them.

"That's correct, ten thousand," he observed easily.

John Armod laughed, too, with a harsh note.

"I suppose if there were five pounds over ten thousand you'd give them back to me?" he sneered.

He placed his foot on a chair and bent over to tighten the lace of the undressed leather shoes he was wearing. The man with the banknotes reached quickly, raised his revolver and struck the rancher on the back of the neck with it.

The rancher went forward with a sprawling crash, rocked to his knees, half-blind with pain, and then roared as he straightened up.

"Loot the place, men!" his attacker shouted over his shoulder. The sailors on the veranda stamped into the room, laughing and falling over each other in their haste to get at the rich hangings and the flasks of wine on the long table against one wall.

IT ALL happened so quickly little John Armod was dazed. He saw his father lunge forward, grip the man nearest him with great hands and fling him across the room. Then revolvers spoke harshly and the great, yellow-haired man bellowed with pain. He struck out with his fists and then picked up a chair and swung it round his head. The man who had struck him first emptied four shots into the rancher. Other guns spat, too. Riddled with lead as he was, John Armod was a long time falling.

He lay on the floor at last and looked up clear-eyed and defiant.

"I'll get you some time for this," he said to the three men who stood looking down on him.

Laughing, they turned away and directed the looting.

Some of the peons came running, attracted by the noise, and some of them died trying to save the house. Little John Armod never knew how long it lasted. He had an idea he sat behind a great door and whimpered for hours. At last he crawled forth and went over to his father.

The big man was hanging to life with

the grimness with which he had lived it. He lifted one weary hand to his son's head, smoothed the silky, yellow hair and tried to chuckle.

"Johnnie," he whispered at last, "you'll go to sea as I said. An Armod belongs there. Fool I was to ever bury myself in this reeking country. Those men, did you see them? Walker, Avery and Crewe. They were in my ship when I was chased by the frigate out of the islands. Deserted at Samoa—where I found your mother. That chest they took—gold and jewels—belongs to you now. Some of it's loot, but a lot of it was got in honest trade. Your honor is involved—Walker, Avery and Crewe. Don't forget——"

He sighed and rested a while.

An old peon came through the living-room, stepping over the smashed furniture and looking about nervously. John Armod called to the man and repeated what he had already told his son.

"They heard I was living here—landed with their crew," he added. "Came in a bark—wanted ten thousand or else they'd report my whereabouts to the British. Wanted for piracy on the high seas." He grinned at that and his fading eyes flashed. "Take the boy to the coast, Sanchez. There is money hidden—a little—in the secret drawer of the desk—behind the big drawer. Send him to sea. An Armod can work out his own life. I'm out of it ——"

He collapsed abruptly and for a long time they thought he was dead. Once before morning he rallied and died as the dawn broke over the eastern hills. Sanchez marveled when they dressed him in his best clothes for burial. There were seven bullet wounds in his chest and stomach. Such a man! The hole they dug was seven feet long to accommodate him comfortably.

Came the long jogging ride to the coast with wrinkled old Sanchez. As in a dream John Armod remembered it in after years. The lights of a seaport. The bearded face of a ship captain gazing at him. Money passing hands. Sanchez fading out of a door with one last backward glance. Then tall masts and spars and men singing queer outland songs under a velvet sky in which the stars were needle-points of light that shed white glimmers across heaving, smooth water. After that a stuffy triangular shaped place in the very bows of the ship, reeking of tar and paint and the sea. More men singing. Drinking and harsh laughter. John Armod took no notice of the noise and the jests at first. Men pawed him over, pinched his sunburned skin and felt his little, hard muscles.

He looked at them with clear, gray eyes and knew them for sailors, such as he was to be.

"An' what are you doin' here?" a white-haired, white-bearded man asked him.

"I'm looking for Walker, Avery and Crewe," he answered gravely, grief stabbing him as he thought of his father.

They laughed at him and demanded to know what manner of men these were. But he did not speak again, only sat in his bunk with his knees drawn up, his hands clasped over them, and his gray eyes staring at the opposite bulkhead, his ears catching the soft water noises against the hull. Tinglings were his, slowly growing more pronounced. He was going to sea at last, as all the Armods did.

He forgot the ranch life as though it had never been, nor did it afterward come back, save at long and irregular intervals, when he was sad or when his absorbing quest was for a while in abeyance. Only once he returned to the inland home he had known; he found the graves lost in the tangles of weed and young trees bulging where before quiet rooms had been.

II

THE ship on which Sanchez had bought the son of his master a place was named the *Carrie S.* and she was a bulky wooden bark out of Liverpool, farming the seas and gleaning profit wherever a hint of it was given. She had called in at Mazatlan, on the Mexican coast, for fresh water and vegetables, being on her way from a shady transaction in the Paumotus to a shadier one in the Pribiloffs.

Her captain was called Nutty Harvey, and was distinguished by a black beard that reached almost to his waist. He was heavy-handed with his crew, a hard drinking man, without creed or loyalty to either friend or country. But he could navigate; his worst enemy conceded him that one fine point. Not only was he a first-class sailorman himself, but he insisted on as much from all his officers. Even to the last boy of his crew, they must be seamen in every sense of the word.

The *Carrie S.* was not a good ship for a seafaring man; the work was too hard.

The captain had a bad name for discharging unsatisfactory men in out-of-the-way ports and leaving them stranded. It was said he was particular and that no man he commanded ever had much leisure. But there were profits to be made out of the bark. She was engaged in whispered matters. She paid enormous wages. She fed well and so long as a man kept his mouth shut and did as he was told in an efficient manner he was sure of a permanent job.

Such a ship was, in many respects, the finest one little John Armod could be on. One thing was certain: Captain Harvey would either make him a sailor or would kill him in the attempt. As the Armods were all natural seamen, the chances were that John would be a very fine sailor indeed before many years went by.

From the first day Captain Harvey had no doubt that, in this yellow-haired boy whom he had agreed to break to the sea, he had a treasure. When the bark rose and swayed in the sea rolls he was not sick. He had a head for work aloft, climbing unafraid to the futtock shrouds on the first day out. He already knew his knots and splices and it was only a day or two before he could steer the ship whenever the weather was calm. He could have steered in heavy weather, too, if he could have held the wheel, but man's strength was not his.

Armod seemed to grow visibly under the influence of hard work and the clean sea air. He fitted into ship life as smoothly as a cork in a bottle; a few jars at first but obviously in the right place. There was so much he knew that other boys had to learn at a rope's end. When he went aloft he remembered his father told him to take the weather shrouds. When splicing he remembered to hammer his tucks. His respect for his companions was nicely graded, from devotion to the black-bearded captain, regard for the lean- sour-visaged mate, to a modest attitude of attention when an able seaman spoke to him. So he got on finely.

He was always quiet, always brooding it seemed. For hours during his watch below, he would sit staring over the taffrail at the smooth sea, gazing away into the violet dusk, heavy with ship smells that appeared to creep up from the water itself. Although only ten years old, he had the gravity of a man of forty.

The *Carrie S.* ran north and east to Kadiak Island, stopped there to trade with some natives that appeared laden with furs, and then sheered on round the tip of the Alaskan Peninsula and ran through to the Pribiloffs. Thereafter she became a ghost, flitting from shelter to shelter, the crack of her guns waking the echoes and the blood from slaughtered seals running over her decks. The men were nervous and seldom slept. Two lookouts were aloft all the time, and John Armod, because of his keen eyes, was one of them.

He was the first to sight the dull smoke down on the southern horizon, his cry bringing the captain leaping up the rigging beside him. Then orders were bellowed along the decks and boatfalls creaked as the dripping boats came in. Sails spread as if by magic and half an hour after the sighting of the smoke the *Carrie S.* was five miles from where she had been. Not only that but she was heeling over with the force of the wind in all her set canvas and every man's eyes were fastened astern on a mushroom of low color that grew nearer minute by minute.

After a while a dull-colored steamer appeared under the smoke. Then a sullen report and something hopped and skipped over the water, far behind the bark. Captain Harvey laughed in his beard and shook his fists, but John Armod, watching from the break of the poop, saw that the captain's eyes were anxious.

The seamen gathered in the waist and talked in low voices while the steamer drew still nearer. Her next shot went over the bark's stern with a dull whistling noise and one or two men cried out. Still the bark kept on, then a shot went through her hull, below the waterline and another sent white splinters cascading from her after deck. The boom of cannon was continuous.

Only the fog saved them. It came rolling down from the northeast, fold on fold of whiteness, blotting the sky and the sea from view. The captain swore with relief and ordered rum for all hands. The helm went over as the bark slid off at right-angles to her course; but she was badly holed, sinking even as she turned. The pumps were rigged, but their clanking was too noisy and the steamer was nosing about in the fog. For safety's sake the whaleboats went overside and sagged at the end of long painters. Someone tried oiling and muffling the pumps and they worked with less noise.

Two hours went by and the fog held. Captain Harvey paced up and down, the strain dying slowly from his face; the steamer must have lost them. The men in the waist talked among themselves again as they worked at the pumps. They could

beach the ship somewhere and repair her, and they had all that rich skin cargo to share out as soon as they were well in the southern seas again. Silent as a ghost the steamer loomed alongside, only the clank of her engines growing clear when her hull rasped the bark's and some of the rigging of the two ships became entangled.

The seamen in the waist dropped the pump handles and stampeded for the side. With them went the captain and the mates, and the whaleboats went pulling into the fog, clear of the bark and the Russian gunboat. No man wanted to rot in Siberia under the paw of the Imperial Bear. When the boarding crew came over the bulwarks of the *Carrie S.* the officer found a little yellow-haired boy standing sturdily in the lee of the midship house.

"Where's the captain?" asked the officer, in bad English.

John Armod motioned indifferently overside. The officer spat and directed his men in Russian; they scattered over the ship. Again he turned to the boy.

"What are you doing here?"

The gray eyes looked into his dark ones steadily. There was no tremor in the voice.

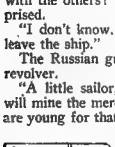
"I'm looking for Walker, Avery and Crewe," he answered.

"Who are they? Why did you not go with the others?" The Russian was surprised.

"I don't know, sir; I had no orders to leave the ship."

The Russian grinned and put away his revolver.

"A little sailor, eh? Well, maybe you will mine the mercury, though I think you are young for that."



THEY took John Armod to the dirty Russian gunboat and the big, bony sailors there laughed and quarreled over him. At last he was turned into a general servant for them, and, all the while the *Carrie S.* was being towed in Vladivostok, he waited on the fo'c's'le men hand and foot. Indeed, he did not see the ship's deck until she had lain in Vladivostok Harbor for nearly two weeks. Then one afternoon, when all the men were ashore or else drunk and asleep in their bunks, he came up from below and crouched beside the lean, somewhat rusty swivel gun in the very bows.

He was thinner and his clothes were rags. There were bruises and sores on his face where men had struck him. He was dirty. His ideal of a sailor's life had been rudely shattered and he had decided that he would not learn much by staying on this ship. He was never given any task such as he had been given on the *Carrie S.* He was never asked to steer or splice or join with the men in washing down the decks. So he crouched by the bow gun and stared over the rainy harbor at the cluttered shipping. His gray eyes were steady still, though perhaps they looked hollower and a little brighter.

Not a cable's length from the gunboat a slim brig rode at anchor, her masts glistening with oil even in the rain, her yards trim and orderly, her ropes not hanging in ugly festoons and bights as they did on the gunboat. At her truck she flew the British flag. John Armod knew it because his father had had such a flag draped over the cabinet in the great ranch living-room.

John saw that amidships the brig had a rope ladder reaching to the water and a boat rode empty alongside the well-kept hull. Then, being a philosopher even at that early age, he curled up under a recking tarpaulin and went to sleep. Nor was he missed until long after dark when some of the gunboat's crew straggled back aboard sober and cursing.

But John Armod did not wait for full dark. As soon as the dusk had grayed the outlines of the low town he came from under his tarpaulin. He dropped overside by one of the many loose rope ends dangling from the rail and shivered a little as he struck the icy water. Then he set his teeth and started on a long swim.

It is doubtful if he would have made it. The water was too cold for swimming and a strong current set against the wharves, away from the brig. But Hooky Ried, who was mate of the craft, coming offshore in the brig's longboat, spotted a little head bobbing through the gathering dusk. The longboat picked up the nearly exhausted swimmer, and when the brig sailed next morning she carried an extra member in her crew.

Much of the next ten or fifteen years was filled with such adventure. From Russia John Armod went to Japan, and then to the islands scattered through the coral seas. He roved along the Australian coast, ran to Africa once or twice, traded in silk at Bombay and in tea at Calcutta. He ran guns into South America and slaves into the Gulf of Mexico. Always he asked for news of Walker, Avery and

Crewe and a certain chest of gold and jewels that was his by right of birth.

Soon he was known as a searcher; "The Searcher" some men called him. Once, in Freemantle, another world-rover called him, "That damned sea gypsy," and the name stuck. As the "Sea Gypsy" he was known from the Kermadecs clear to the Seychelles, even before he won to his own ship and sailed out of Lisbon with wine and dried fruits for Sydney on the first definite trail he had followed.

He struck that trail in this manner. He was paid off from the full-rigged ship *Bochnia* in Marseilles on his twenty-fourth birthday, drawing approximately three thousand dollars as two and a half years' pay as mate. He chanced to have five thousand saved of his own money and he had borrowed ten thousand from a friend who owned a fleet of fishing vessels running out of Palma, a town in the Island of Majorca.

In Marseilles Harbor at that time was a slender, clean built barkentine, captured by the French while smuggling brandy into Senegal under the French flag. Shipping was at a low ebb, freights were scarce, and John Armod bought the *Lucy Carroll* for a song. He raked together a crew of twelve lazy sailors who were willing to go at small pay so long as they were allowed to take things easy, sailed his ship to Lisbon and through the good efforts of his friend at Palma obtained a cargo of wine and dried fruits for Sydney.

Now the firm the wine was consigned for was known as Avery and Walker. When John Armod heard this he remained seated in his chair before the desk of the merchant whose goods he was shipping. He remained seated for so long, and was so still, that the merchant eyed him curiously.

"What's the matter?" he asked finally.

The sailor's eyes were set very intently on the opposite wall, as though endless distance confronted them, or the picture there was that of a live, rocking ship instead of a daub of oil on canvas. The merchant's question roused him.

"You said Avery and Walker," he repeated quietly, bringing his eyes down to the other's. "Have you ever met them?"

"Why, I saw them once in London. Do you know them?" The merchant was surprised.

"That's what I'm trying to find out." Armod lighted a cigar with deliberation and blew smoke in the direction of the pictured ship.

"Oh." The merchant was mystified. He gestured with fat, white hands and said, "I really only met Walker. Avery's out of the firm. Sold out ten years ago and has gone to Java to raise coffee, I believe. The firm is important in Australasia. Owns a good many trading stations throughout the islands, I believe, besides acting as a sort of wholesalers to nearly all the big Sydney stores."

"What sort of a man is Walker?"

"Tall and rather stout. A little bald. Big lips and an ugly temper. Between ourselves," the merchant leaned forward, "they say he's got a bad reputation in the islands. No one seems to know how he got his money, but he's worth nearly a million now—pounds, not dollars or francs. There's been a lot of talk about his high-handed methods with the natives, but you know the Pacific's pretty wild yet."

John Armod nodded. He studied the glowing tip of his cigar and frowned. At last he rose.

"Can't say I recall your Walker," he said. "You don't happen to know whether he was ever in Mexico, do you?"

"Can't say I ever heard it mentioned. Likely he was though. He was a sailor once, I believe."

"All right; that's all." The young man reached for his blue-peaked officer's cap and started for the door. "I'll report as soon as I reach Sydney, about the wine. If I ever hit Lisbon again I hope you'll scrape up a cargo for me."

"Probably, yes, very probably. It all depends on how this consignment's delivered. Good luck, Captain."

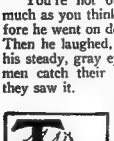
John Armod closed the office door behind him and went down the cool passageway into the hot street. His gray eyes dreamed into distance and unconsciously he walked with wide legs and swinging arms as though a deck heaved underfoot. Men turned to gaze after this yellow-haired man, this broad-shouldered young giant so obviously of the sea. Women watched him with narrowed eyes. Little children clucked at the sight of him. So he came to the docks where the *Lucy Carroll* was waiting.

He spoke three short words to his French mate, "Sail at once," and then went below the poop deck to his cabin. Dropping to a chair, he leaned forward over the little writing desk, propping his face in his hands. He did not hear the clatter of shoes on the deck above him, nor the creak of rope and the low mutter of orders. He was intent on a scene that

rose from the long ago—old John Armod, yellow-haired and strong, on his back with seven bullet wounds, calling on his son to remember Walker, Avery and Crewe.

It had been a long, long aimless search, not a clue to build on, not a friend to help. Now, by sheer accident, the trail had come to him. What he would do when he met Walker he did not know. He did not attempt even to think about it. Somehow it seemed that matters would arrange themselves; as sure as fate he would be Nemesis hovering over the lives of three middle-aged men.

"You're not out of it, Dad. Not so much as you think," he muttered once, before he went on deck to take over the ship. Then he laughed, coldly, and the flame in his steady, gray eyes was such as to make men catch their breath and wince when they saw it.



THE *Lucy Carroll* ran south and west from Lisbon, wallowed in the doldrums off the Plata River and then hogged on south before the press of a screaming pampero. She then lay hove to fifty miles east of Cape Virgin, at the entrance to the Magellan Straits, breasting a howling wind that blew from the west, eternally from the west, and against which no sailing ship could force a way.

There have been times when such ships, held by the head winds off the Magellans, have been forced, after weary weeks, to turn and run right round the world to make the Pacific Ocean. The *Lucy Carroll* was more fortunate. At the end of four days the wind veered to the north and west and she slipped through the straits without trouble, except that ice caked her from truck to catheads. Once in the Pacific she struck a fair breeze that took her clear to a point south of the Kernadecs. Thereafter she battled calms and squalls again, until a half-gale drove her right through Sydney Heads.

John Armod went ashore as soon as the barkentine was tied alongside the wharf. A longshoreman pointed out the offices of Avery and Walker. They were a scant quarter of a mile from the waterfront. Armod pushed open the swing door of the outer office and asked for Mr. Walker.

A lean looking clerk frowned at him and inquired his name. When it was spoken the frown vanished, for a ship captain with a cargo for the firm was of some importance. But Mr. Walker was not in. His secretary beckoned from an inner office and John Armod crossed to meet him.

"You want Mr. Walker, Captain? My name's Simpson, secretary to Mr. Walker. How do you do?". They shook hands. "You want Mr. Walker? Not important, I hope? He's somewhere in the Samoan Islands now. Went away on one of his own schooners to see about a new trading station, I believe."

"That's too bad."

John Armod looked into the other man's eyes but so far as he could fathom the truth was being told. Why should it not be? Walker could not suspect anything. He couldn't know that old John Armod's son was sailing the sea lanes looking for him.

"Where in Samoa is he?"

The secretary hesitated, lowered his eyes. Then decision was his. He looked up.

"It's a secret mission, Captain. I can only say he's in the Samoan Group arranging some deal with the natives."

John Armod nodded and looked down on the other. He thought for a while. Certainly he was not impressed at the men Walker had around him. This secretary had a shifty mouth and a nervous habit of twitching his lips. The lean clerk in the outer office looked like a medieval conspirator. Even the hunched figure of a boy in one corner of the outer office, busy with a thick ledger, had a sinister look.

"If you have any important business with Mr. Walker maybe I could help," the secretary ventured. "He confides everything in me."

"It doesn't matter." John Armod shrugged his shoulders and lifted his yellow head indifferently. "I just wanted to see him. Don't know where I could get a cargo for the islands do you?"

"No, I don't." The secretary was suspicious at once. "And I don't think you could find Mr. Walker if you went to Samoa."

"That's too bad," commented the big sailor again.

He left the office abruptly, biting at a cigar and fumbling in one pocket for a match. The lean clerk held open the door for him, produced a match, struck it and held it up to light Armod's cigar.

"What's it worth—Mr. Walker's whereabouts?" he whispered.

John Armod never winked an eye. He had long found that an impassive exterior was desirable for a sea gypsy. He had a

profound respect for the little joss of Chance. It was his experience that Chance was apt to take a hand in any game when the players least expected it. It was his firm conviction that Chance, when it cropped up, should be met squarely, accepted or discarded, taken humbly and with due respect for its flippant spirit.

When the clerk whispered John Armod merely made a curt motion with his head and the clerk's eyes lowered as a sign that he understood. The office door closed behind the sailor. He went to the end of the passageway outside the office and leaned against the wall, gazing dreamily at a fat fly crawling over a square packing case. After a while the clerk came, his hat on, his thin lips pressed together in a determined line. He motioned with a packet of envelopes.

"I'm to post these letters. Walk along with me."

Armod fell in step and strode beside him.

"Are you a Government agent?" the clerk commenced abruptly.

The other shook his head and blew smoke through his fine-cut nostrils.

"Then why do you want Walker so urgently?"

"That's my business."

"Oh, quite so, quite so. I just wondered. Well, what's it worth to know where he is?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Is the money with you?" eagerly.

"I can get it on my ship."

"I'll walk there with you—or call a hack," the clerk quickly agreed.

They hailed a carriage and got in. Once the dock was reached Armod went aboard the *Lucy Carroll* and returned with a neat packet of Bank of England notes. He got in the cab again and the clerk called to the driver to go on, anywhere for the present. Then he held out his hand for the money.

"Walker's at his trading station at Samatau, west end of Upolu Island."

"Why is his mission secret?"

"Now I know you're not a government man," the clerk laughed slyly. "Well, he's agent for the German firm of Godeffroy and Sohn of Hamburg. They've a branch in Apia, you know."

"Well?"

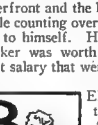
"It's easy to see you aren't acquainted with the islands. Well, the Germans are supplying guns and ammunition to the Samoans in spite of the consular agreement between England, Germany and the United States. Walker's using his trading station as a clearing house. Handles guns and receives gold from the natives. That's all I know. There's a lot of talk that Germany wants control of the archipelago and is backing a revolution, but that may be just gossip."

"All right." John Armod called to the driver and the hack stopped. "You said the trading station at Samatau?"

"On the west end of Upolu Island. That's correct. Now I'll get back to the office. Not a word, mind, or I'll lose my job. And if you ever want any other information, well——"

"I understand." Armod got out of the hack and nodded. "Thanks."

He strode back in the direction of the waterfront and the hack went on, the clerk inside counting over bank-notes and chuckling to himself. His job with Avery and Walker was worth much more than the scant salary that went with it.



BEFORE going on board the *Lucy Carroll* John Armod turned aside into a saloon that was obviously frequented by sailors. He ordered whisky and sipped it slowly while gazing around. Three men in a corner drank beer from huge glasses and argued noisily about the respective sailing merits of a schooner and a bark. At a table near them sat a burly, squat man with a tanned, wrinkled face and fine black hair that was graying about the temples. His sunburned arms and hands were splotched with tattooing and in his ears he wore thin rings of gold. He chewed tobacco with a slow, sideway motion of his jaw and the nicotine seemed in no wise to impede his drinking. He wore dirty duck pants, canvas shoes, and a blue flannel shirt with the sleeves rolled up.

At the other end of the long bar, before which Armod stood, two men read a paper together, interjecting an occasional oath or muttered sentence. It was a slack time of day for the waterfront, early afternoon. Later, when dusk fell, more sailors would drift in. The piano in the corner would strike up, women would sidle through the door, laughing and measuring the men with cold eyes.

Armod leaned across to the bartender.

"I'm Captain Armod of the barkentine *Lucy Carroll*," he informed. "Where can I get a man who knows the Samoans?"

The bartender spat aside and set down the glass he had already polished to crystal clearness. He squinted slowly round the saloon and his eyes finally came to rest on the squat man sitting alone at the table.

"Hi, Drummond!"

The man addressed looked up lazily and stared at the bartender out of the deepest blue eyes Armod had ever seen. Then he rose from his chair and came forward, waddling almost like a bear and squirting tobacco juice along the sawdust covered floor.

"This's Cap'n Armod," said the bartender. "Wants a man t' go with him t' the Samoans. That right, Cap'n? This's Mike Drummond. He was mate to Bully Hayes once."

They shook hands. Armod motioned to the bartender and new drinks were served. Then he regarded this wrinkled seaman with grave gray eyes that missed nothing and seemed to probe deep into the stuff of men that makes them what they are.

"You know the islands well?" he said at last.

The other spat, took a drink and nodded slowly.

"I take it you're offering me a job? I know the islands as well as any man in Sydney, better than most. I've got master's papers and I've owned my own ship—at times. What's the proposition?"

"I'm sailing for Samoa tomorrow morning, at dawn if the tide's right," Armod explained. "I want to discharge my old crew and get another—I'm carrying dagoes now. If you want the job and your papers are all right, I'll carry you as mate."

"What ship're you sailing?"

"Barkentine *Lucy Carroll*."

"I saw her come in this morning," the other nodded. "Trim packet."

There was silence for a while. John Armod sipped at his liquor and waited.

Michael Drummond munched at his quid and squinted at the floor.

"Aye, she's a trim packet," he repeated. "What game you on, Cap'n? Trading?"

"Anything I can make money at," Armod shrugged. "If you come as mate, knowing the Samoans, I'll ask your advice."

"Seems all right. Well, here's my hand. I'm game for most anything an' so long as I get my grub and pay and nothing too raw's pulled, the sky's the limit."

John Armod permitted a smile to cross his face and he shook hands with his new officer.

III

THEY went on board the *Lucy Carroll* and once in the saloon Armod began questioning.

"You've heard of Walker, member of Avery and Walker?"

"Seems like I have," Drummond admitted. "He's some notorious."

"He's in the Samoan Group now, and I've got to find him. He's at Samatau selling guns to the natives. What's the situation?"

Drummond dropped to a chair and looked thoughtful.

"I was up in Samoa a year ago," he commenced, "and there was talk of a rebellion. It's this way. Old King Malietoa was at outs with the squareheads and they were causing a lot of trouble among the young bucks, kiddin', 'em on to rebel and all that. According to some agreement the European consuls had come to, no one was to sell arms to the Kanakas. But that squarehead firm, Goddfrey's or something—aye, Godeffroy and Sohn, that's it—started to run some guns in, I suspect with the unofficial aid of the big bugs in the East. I'd figure Walker'd be mixed up in such a deal. In another year or so, when there's enough weapons passed around, there'll be a blow-up and old King Malietoa'll be kicked off and some other pup will take over the throne and demand a squarehead mandate.

"That's the last dope I know. Now what do you propose t' do? Are you aiming to run guns for the rebels? Or, if you want some real action and want t' see a decent Kanaka stay on the throne, run some in to Malietoa. He'll pay gold for 'em. I know. It's a standing offer through the islands but no one's got the guts to try, because he'd finish up in jail. The squareheads'd be on him like a ton of bricks and the other consuls'd help. It's a hell of a mix-up."

Drummond squirted tobacco juice with unerring aim into a metal cuspidor and squinted over at Armod with wide blue eyes. The yellow-haired sailor stirred in his chair and talked without visible emotion.

"First I want Walker," he said. "I've a personal and private affair to settle. As to running guns," he shrugged; "anything that'll pay my expenses. I've run 'em before, into Brazil and Chile."

"I don't like Walker myself," commenced Drummond. He scratched the blue tattooing on his right arm with thick, hairy fingers. "Never did anything much to me, but I had a partner once 'e ruined in a shady deal. If you want to get rid of him I'd say you better turn him over to Malietoa. That old boy'd pay real gold to lay hands on Walker without the square-heads knowing it."

"I want him myself—alone," said John Armod clearly and his gray eyes stared into the deep blue of Drummond's.

He put out his hands, fists clenched, and smiled grimly. The other man shivered a little and spat again.

"I shouldn't like to have you after me," he commented. Then, after a pause, "Shall I fix a cargo for you? I know the parties you could interest."

"Do that," nodded Armod. "I've got to get to Samoa and I can't run a ship with empty holds. I'm not a millionaire."

They had another drink and then Michael Drummond rolled out of the saloon, up the companion and along the main deck of the barkentine to where the gangplank ran to the wharf. He disappeared round the corner of a low shed and did not return until dusk was misting everything with violet and the sinking sun was dying in a mad blaze in the west. Thereafter there was much talking and drinking and smoking in the saloon of the *Lucy Carroll* and ever and anon would rise over all other noises the boom of a deep voice, clear, full-toned, like the voice of old John Armod filling the ranch-house years before.

Four days after the saloon conferences the *Lucy Carroll* sailed for Apia with trade goods and plantation stores.

The run, approximately north-by-west from Sydney, was not expected to be exciting. Rather the reverse. In those waters at that season calms were frequent and gales the exception to the rule. The first few days were busy ones for Armod and his new mate, for they had a new crew to lick into shape and the barkentine had not been in port long enough for repairs after the long voyage from Lisbon.

John Armod found that in Drummond he had a treasure. The man was a first-class sailor and navigator, and, though he seemed possessed of an elastic code of ethics, he also seemed to be a loyal man once he had cast his lot in a stated venture. He explained once to Armod that he had left Bully Hayes because that semi-pirate wantonly mistreated natives, without cause, and because he couldn't keep his word. As to some of Hayes's little habits of abducting women and bullying copra and sandalwood out of traders and natives at ruinous prices, Drummond thought they were all right, so long as the women were willing, as island women usually were, and so long as the natives had no use for the copra and sandalwood, which they generally hadn't. He made no comment about the traders.

Drummond could see that he was now with a different man than Bully Hayes. This captain preferred the more or less honest game, though he was not averse to taking a risk. But he would keep his word, keep his word even though it cost him his life. Besides, Armod had wonderful physique and a rather pleasing way of speaking, slowly and clearly, that was far more effective than any shouting could have been. On the whole Drummond liked him. Indeed, he liked him so much that he relented on the fourth day from Sydney and made a confession.

"I've got you on a wild-goose chase," he said, "bringing these guns. There's not a chance in a million you'll land them. Fact is, I got a rake off from the sellers by getting you to try the blockade. They'll clear a hundred per cent. profit if Malietoa buys 'em and if you get pinched they'll collect insurance some nervy guy's lettin' them have."

John Armod said nothing. Only his gray eyes fastened on Drummond so that that squat sailorman moved uncomfortably.

"Aw, I hadn't signed with you then—an' you were in such a hell of a hurry to get to Samoa," Drummond defended. "That insurance guy took a couple of looks at you, hunted around and found something about your record and then decided to put up his money."

"I see," John Armod stated calmly; "I was to be the goat. If I fail to deliver the guns and get caught, I go to jail and lose my ship, while the rest clean up whatever happens. I suppose even the insurance was obtained at a big premium. Well," the iron jaw hardened and the gray eyes brightened a trifle, "I'll sell those guns to Malietoa if I have to stay in the Samoans a year to do it."

Drummond chuckled and bit off a chew from a gnawed-plug.

"You're the sort that would, but you'll have your work cut out. Soon as you hit Apia you'll be boarded by everybody in sight. The king's crying for guns to put down the rebellion with and the consuls know it. The squareheads'll watch you

like a hawk. First gun you land, in jail you go."

"We'll see," was all John Armod said as he walked away.

Drummond looked after him with speculative eyes and spat in the scuppers.

"Just a kid," he muttered. "Still, it's the kids and fools that pull stuff off. And not a word about my side deal with the merchants."

THE *Lucy Carroll* sailed into Apia looking about as much unlike a smuggler as was possible. She had nothing to conceal and she was willing to prove it. It was true that matters looked suspicious for a while when the barkentine was literally overrun with eager natives who had heard in some mysterious fashion that there were guns aboard, case after case of Winchesters and plenty of ammunition.

Armod was quite frank about it. He had heard that King Malietoa wanted weapons and he had come to do business. The natives, most of them Malietoa's men, were jubilant. Also they were relieved. There would be no longer any fear of being murdered like sheep when the rebellion broke.

When the turmoil was at its highest, and just as Armod had a case of rifles broken open for inspection, the consuls arrived. They came together, very solemn, very inquisitive. What was the cargo to cause such commotion. There had been rumors drifting ashore. Oh, guns? Well, it was their duty to warn John Armod, master of the *Lucy Carroll*, that his ship would be seized and detained until the arrival of a British man-o'-war if he landed one single gun or one solitary shell. It was the British consul who said that, as the barkentine was flying the British flag.

"What's the matter?" asked John Armod, his face frank and no hint of guile in his voice.

They told him carefully. There was a gentleman's agreement that no arms were to be supplied the natives. Danger of bloodshed, and the whole island as it was on the verge of war. The British consul appeared to be quite unaware that at one end of the island Walker, of Avery and Walker, was dealing with the rebels. As a matter of fact, he was. What news reached him had been carefully censored and he, in common with the United States and French consul, believed that Malietoa's fears were much exaggerated.

"I'm sorry," said Armod with a frown. "I expected to do quite a lot of business with the king. I've come a thousand miles out of my way, and I can tell you my owners'll be pretty upset about it. I'm bound on a trading voyage through the Carolines and Marshalls."

The consuls admitted it was too bad, but they could do nothing. Armod drew Drummond aside and talked for a while. Then he faced the consuls again.

"Better come aft and drink, gentlemen," he invited. "But you might clear the Kanakas off my decks if I can't do any business with them. I'll want to go ashore later on and I can't leave the ship like this."

The German consul interposed here. He had many things to consider, chief amongst which was that he couldn't let Malietoa get guns from any source whatever.

"We'll put a guard of the police aboard until you sail," he said.

The British and American consuls hesitated. Privately they favored Malietoa's side in the island squabble and, if they had really thought it necessary for his majesty to arm his loyal subjects, they might have tried some means of getting the weapons to him. But they couldn't refuse the German consul's request. Besides, they really did think the king was unnecessarily nervous. They accepted gracefully and the police flag was run up. Then all hands went aft for a drink.

When the consuls returned to the shore John Armod accompanied them.

"I just want to stretch my legs and find out about some fresh vegetables and water," he explained. "I'll have to be sailing tomorrow sometime."

They were pleased to have him and told him so. They regretted about the guns, but trusted he would understand. Armod did, perfectly. He accepted an invitation to dinner and strolled away along the shore, a sun-helmet tilted back on his yellow head and a smile playing round his mouth. Presently Drummond came ashore and joined him and they disappeared. Meanwhile two seamen carried up a case of whisky and some cabin stores to the consuls' residences as a slight gift. As European supplies were very scarce in Apia just then, the delicacies were appreciated.

"Get hold of a Kanaka and we'll send a note," Armod said abruptly, when they were away from the town. "Can he read English?"

Drummond nodded.

"Malietoa's a pretty wise old duck. Hi!"

A Kanaka came at the call and stood on one foot while Drummond questioned him. Yes, he was loyal to Malietoa. No, he didn't want a German mandate. Armod gave him a folded slip of paper and the Kanaka ran away. The two white men sat on a fallen tree and waited, fanning the flies away with their handkerchiefs and cursing the heat.

"It'll be easy," said Armod once, half to himself.

"It will if the old boy agrees," Drummond replied. "Not that I suppose he won't. He's on his toes with nervousness. But it seems too easy."

"Yes, that's the reason it hasn't been tried."

They were silent then for a long time. Presently Armod rose and stretched and looked up at the blazing sun. Faint steps sounded on the dust of the path and there was a flutter of white round a bend. John Armod grew rigid and his gray eyes widened a little.

The flutter of white steadied and a girl came down the path. Drummond clambered to his feet and mopped the back of his neck. He bent his head a trifle.

"Mornin', miss," he said.

John Armod did not move. He seemed to have forgotten he wore a solar topee. The girl glanced at him, flushed faintly and then went on.

Armod turned slowly to the grinning Drummond.

"Who's that?" he asked, a little thickly.

"That's the old Buzzard's daughter—name o' Vera."

"And who's 'the old Buzzard'?"

"He's in at all the big killings made hereabouts. Pearl-buyer mostly, but owns about half the plantations and ships south of Honolulu. Got a big house in Batavia, where his daughter mostly stays. Spends the coolest months here though, and then goes down to Sydney or up to 'Frisco. Got the looks, eh?"

"Nice name, Vera."

"No use, sir. Every schooner man in the islands has proposed to her, but she turns 'em down regular. There was an English earl wanted to get divorced to marry her, but she laughed at him an' he got so mad 'e near choked to death. Proud she is. An' the old Buzzard'd kill anyone who so much as laid a finger on her."

John Armod did not reply. His eyes were brooding and his lips were smiling ever so faintly. Drummond grunted and spat with some energy. The native who had taken Armod's note came running back, panting, his tongue hanging out like a dog's. He handed a dirty, sweat-stained fragment of paper to the yellow-haired white man.

King Malietoa had written:

When the sun sets. At Tanuamamanono.

Drummond spat again.

"Tanuamamanono's a bush village," he informed. "I know the way. The old boy'll play up, sir."

"I thought so," murmured Armod, stuffing the paper into his pocket.

He tossed a small gold coin to the native who grew paralyzed at the sight of it. Then he started back for the waterfront, Drummond swaying and grumbling beside him. They had almost reached the wharf when the old Buzzard's daughter passed them again, walking with a finely set-up young man in the white uniform of a naval man.

John Armod stopped and looked after them. His hands were in his pockets and his big body was slack with the heat. He stood still for a long time. Then he faced forward again.

"I'm going to marry that girl, Drummond." His voice was serious.

"Um," said Drummond, cynically, but he nearly swallowed his tobacco.

"She needs a man to look after her—and do I look like a man who talks just for the sake of talking?"

"No," Drummond admitted, "you do not. Still—well, I'd say if any man stood a chance to get her you've got a show. But don't think she's easy. I could tell you tales about the old Buzzard's daughter."

"I'll hear them," said Armod, lazily, "as soon as we get aboard."

He dreamed all the rest of the way back to the ship and most of the time while Drummond talked to him in the saloon. Also he smiled at irregular intervals, although nothing funny had been said. Drummond snorted.

Just before sunset Armod went ashore with Drummond and struck out for the brush. They traveled inland at a steady rate until a native met them, nodded his head and led them along a side path, off the main path, heavy with flowers and perfume. Presently they came to a village and other natives appeared. Then they were led before the king.

AT DINNER that night Armod said to the consuls, "I've got to ask a favor of you fellows; want to save myself a lot of work."

"Shoot!" said the United States man, laconically.

"It's like this, gentlemen. I know you're short of all European stores and it'll be a month before the supply ships arrive. I'll sell you what stuff you want at Sydney prices on condition you do me that favor."

"Spit it out," snapped the English consul with some irritation.

The German leaned across the table and beamed.

"Vot is der favor?" he asked.

John Armod lighted his cigar and studied the glowing tip for a while.

"I want to land my guns and ammunition and leave them here until I return," he said, abruptly. "If I pack them along it'll mean shifting them about every time I want to get at a case of trade stuff. You can understand that. I'll pay any reasonable sum for warehousing and you can lock them up for me. Not much good me carrying all that stuff through the Carolines and Marshalls, is it?"

The consuls conferred briefly. There could not be much objection. Any trading captain would rather have space than useless cases of guns during a trading voyage, and you couldn't sell guns either in the Carolines or Marshalls. Besides, it was true there was a shortage of European goods, and it would be perfectly legitimate for this sailor to make them pay double Sydney prices for what they wanted. His offer to sell at Sydney price was more than generous. They agreed quickly, even the German consul coming into line. What harm could the guns do? It might even be arranged so that, should the rebellion break soon, they would fall into the rebels' hands.

Armod left the consuls feeling very pleased. He would land the guns and ammunition tomorrow morning early. By noon he would be at sea. The rest was up to King Malietoa. He was so intent with his plans that he did not at first notice the girl remonstrating with a man who swayed and hiccoughed with drunken gravity.

"Would you remove this man for me, please," a voice drew his attention.

Then Armod looked up and forgot all about King Malietoa and the suspicious consuls. Almost at his side stood Vera, the old Buzzard's daughter, and her fingers touched the white duck of his uniform jacket.

This time he lifted his hand to his helmet in a sort of half salute.

"This is one of my men," the girl went on, talking in a soft, low voice that made every cord of John Armod sing and vibrate. "He was to take me back to my ship but he's been drinking. Would you pull him away from the steps? I can row myself over."

"Of course," said Armod evenly, though his pulses were hammering.

He could catch a vague odor of perfume from her and the brightness of her dark eyes dazed him. He seemed to notice her all at once, without consciously examining her. He saw her smooth, clean hands, her red mouth and slightly upturned nose, her white teeth and the perfect column of her throat. Then the drunken seaman pushed between and touched his forehead.

"I'm all ri', Miss Vera, all ri'," he spoke thickly. "Take you back t' the ship. Take you back all ri'."

Armod brushed the man aside impatiently, as he might have brushed a fly, and gave his arm to the girl. She reddened a little under his intent gaze. Then she set her lips and allowed herself to be led down the wharf steps to the waiting dinghy. John Armod got in the little craft and slid out the oars.

"I can row," the girl protested.

The yellow-haired sailor shook his head and laughed.

"I'm John Armod, master of the *Lucy Carroll*—that barkentine over there—I can row too," he told her.

He sent the dinghy ploughing away from the wharf. The girl frowned and settled back in the stern sheets. Ashore the drunken seaman stood and swayed and scratched his befuddled head.

Armod looked over his shoulder and saw, lying at anchor, a long, slim schooner-yacht, painted white, her booms scraped and polished and her furled canvas white and clean-looking. Instinctively he headed the dinghy that way. The girl watched him covertly from under long lashes. He was good to look at in the light of the young moon. He bulked large against the sky and he swung the dinghy oars without apparent effort. She was aware that he was studying her too and after a while she lowered her eyes.

"They told me you were the old Buz-

zatd's daughter," Armod drawled, with a hint of amusement. "I congratulate him."

There was a pause. The girl seemed undecided whether to resent the observation or ignore it. Finally she laughed.

"Father's bark is a lot worse than his bite," she answered. "I hope you don't think I'm a helpless sort of creature to have to ask your help. I happen to have on a dress I don't wish pawed over by drunken men. Otherwise I could manage Bruges—would have taken him on board in fact."

"I've been told you're capable," Armod admitted.

They said no more until the dinghy grazed the hull of the schooner-yacht near the gangway lowered to the water. An officer stood on the deck.

"Where's Bruges, Miss Vera?" he called.

The girl looked up.

"He's rather—helpless, Mr. Clark," she replied. "Will you send a man back to get him?" Then to Armod, "Thanks so much—I want you to visit me sometime."

She held out her hand and Armod took it, pressing it gently. He touched his cap as the girl went up the gangway. A seaman came along the deck and joined Armod in the boat. Together they went back to the shore and Armod helped the seaman carry the drunken Bruges down the wharf steps.

WHEN Armod returned to his own ship he found Drummond pacing the poop, despite the heat, and spitting at regular intervals into the calm water of the harbor. The squat sailor stopped when he heard his captain's shoes on the companion.

"All right, sir?"

"Everything went off great, Drummond. We land the stuff tomorrow."

Both men went down to the saloon and after a short conversation turned in. Midships grouped the small guard of police that the consuls had placed aboard so that no guns could be sold.

Armod was on deck at daybreak, just in time to see the schooner-yacht, the *Nautilus*, gliding out to sea. He leaned on the taffrail and mused, wondering where she was bound and when he would see her again. See her he would, and talk again with her owner he would. He wished he didn't have this Walker and the gun business on his mind so much. Soon as it was over he'd start out to get what he wanted.

John Armod, like all his breed, was not much affected by women. All the Armods, when they met the one woman, put the past behind them and, marrying, settled down. John Armod had said he intended to marry Vera. It was more than a statement; it was the innate morality of the Armods coming to the top and having done with riotous days. As to whether Vera would marry John Armod—a sea gypsy would get what he wanted, providing he was determined enough, and humble enough, and gave due respect to the joss of Chance.

The schooner-yacht slipped out to sea, rising and falling as she met the swells. At last, like a blur of pearl, she faded into the brightening sun. John Armod felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to find Drummond biting a chew from his gnawed plug.

"When do we start, sir?"

"The German consul is coming aboard at eight to check the cases as they go overside. The British consul will check them at the municipal warehouse."

"Aye. And we sail at noon?"

Armod's jaw tightened. The question recalled him to stern things.

"We sail at noon," he assented. "For Samatau."

They went below together for breakfast and a drink. The German consul appeared soon after eight o'clock and by that time everything was ready for slinging the guns and ammunition overside. The unloading commenced. The consul on board checked each case in a notebook. The consul ashore checked them again. So it was certain that no cases disappeared going from the barkentine to the warehouse. Once in the warehouse four policemen, all natives, stood on guard. Armod landed supplies, as many as the consuls required, and took for them a draft on the Bank of New Zealand.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when the German consul went overside and ashore again. He was very pleased because he had arranged privately with the rebels on Upolu that they were to take over the weapons as soon as the rebellion started. He knew that Godeffroy and Sohn of Hamburg would forward him a neat check when that deal became known.

At eleven-thirty a solitary canoe put out from the shore and a giant Samoan brought her alongside the barkentine. He called up from the water to where Drummond stood, lounging over the port taffrail. Drummond dropped a line overside and

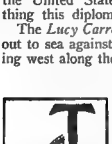
the native made fast a heavy canvas sack. Armod came and helped his mate hoist it to the deck. Another sack followed and then the canoe went back to the shore again. Armod and Drummond hurried the sacks to the saloon and dumped them on the table. They clinked with their own weight.

"Gold," said Armod easily, opening one sack and bringing shining coins to light. 'English sovereigns. I wonder—if the British are backing Malietoa."

"Unofficially, sure," drawled Drummond. He spat and thought for a moment. "So's the United States and France. 'Eli of thing this diplomacy stuff, ain't it?"

The *Lucy Carroll* sailed at noon, beating out to sea against a gentle wind and curving west along the coast to make Samatau.

IV



HE barkentine found a fair wind outside Apia and on an almost even keel she skirted the coral reefs. The sky was deep blue, an aching blue that seemed to reach away to some dark background out of vision. The sea was purple, hard lights where the swells crested, soft tones in the hollows. Flying fish broke water and plunged again. Occasionally a bigger fish leaped in a shower of silver. A few birds wheeled or hung like shapeless dots high above. Ashore the white sand was backed by brilliant green jungle, or, where coral rock ran right to the shore, tall palms bent slightly in the soft wind.

The *Lucy Carroll* passed the Malua mission two hours after leaving Apia and through the glasses the white-clothed forms of the missionary and his wife could be seen standing on the broad, cool veranda, watching the barkentine ease by like a phantom ship floating in the air. After Malua they passed Ulutauvalu, and natives waved lazily from the beach. Once a canoe sped out but returned when informed the barkentine was not trading thereabouts, especially not trading gin.

They curved right round the coral reefs, round Toloa Point, on outside Manona Island until they sighted the hump of Apolima rising out of the swells. Drummond advised against making the passage between Apolima and Manono. He had run aground once, he said, sailing through there in a sloop that only drew four feet of water. So Armod changed his course and went outside of Apolima Island, curving back again toward the mainland, sighting Cape Fatuosofia on the port beam and, just as dusk was falling, Samatau on the port bow.

A ship was anchored outside the coral, opposite the boat passage, a rakish looking three-masted schooner. Drummond peered at her through the glasses and spat overside.

"That's one of the Avery and Walker boats," he remarked.

Armod nodded.

"They told me Walker had come up here in one of his own schooners. Well, we'll anchor."

The crew of the schooner, mostly natives, regarded the *Lucy Carroll* with some curiosity and a little sullenness as she approached. They were on dangerous business and they knew it. This ship might be there to make investigations, and even though they knew the German consul was unofficially behind them they were apprehensive of the anger of the British and Americans if much should come to light.

Ashore, on the trading house veranda, several white-clothed figures could be seen examining the *Lucy Carroll* through glasses. Armod directed the lowering of a whaleboat and went ashore with two seamen. Drummond was left on board.

It was dark by the time Armod landed. He left the seamen with the boat and walked alone up the path to the trading house. A stout, perspiring man with a bald head came to meet him.

"You wish water or stores, Captain?"

Armod shook his head and smiled. The other mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief and cursed the heat.

"I want to see Mr. Walker," said Armod.

He hooked his thumbs in his belt and regarded the German trader with grave eyes. The trader blinked.

"My name is Keugler," he mumbled at last. "Will you 'ave a drink, Captain?"

"Perhaps. I'm John Armod of the barkentine *Lucy Carroll*."

They went the remainder of the distance together. Several men lounged in chairs on the house veranda, drinking and smoking, laughing occasionally. Two of them watched Armod's approach.

He had gone up the first of the veranda steps when another man rose from a deep cane chair and peered at him through the darkness.

"Who's this, Keugler?" he snapped in a thick, throaty voice.

Armod could see that this was a tall,

stout man with thick lips, a little bald also. He smiled grimly and waited.

"A gaptain," panted Keugler. "He is of der barkentine *Lucy Carroll*, Herr Walker."

"The *Lucy Carroll?*" Two other men rose from their chairs, menacing, dim in their whites.

One of them swore. Someone shouted in German and a house-boy brought a light. Then a strange thing happened.

"Wasn't it the *Lucy Carroll* that brought guns into Apia for Malietoa?" one man started to say. "Where's that note that came down coast yesterday, Keugler?"

Before the trader could speak, the tall, stout man with the thick lips snatched the lantern from the house-boy and flashed the light on Armod's face.

"Armod! But you're dead, John Armod! What sort of deal is this?"

"What is it, Herr Walker?" put in a voice. "Do you know this man?"

The man called Walker had sank back in his chair again and was rubbing nervous hands along his thighs.

"No; I was mistaken. I must be mistaken. But you look like a man I used to know, Captain."

Armod stood still and big in the lamplight, his gray eyes cold, his thumbs still hooked in his belt, a little smile on his face. He stared at Walker and spoke softly. The others listened, sensing some climax here; even Keugler, the trader, forgot to mop his heated brow.

"I want to tell you first that I landed my guns this morning. I put them in the municipal warehouse under a police guard with the consent of the consuls. Tonight Malietoa's men will take them, the police being loyal to him. That fixes your game with the rebels. I imagine your sort hates to lose, so I thought I'd let you know. Malietoa can fight now and hold his throne without aid."

Someone swore deliberately. The lamplight glinted on the dull steel of a revolver. Armod took no heed. He watched Walker, and that worthy had ceased to move his hands along his thighs. A horrible suspicion was dawning in his mind. He licked his lips.

"Who are you?" he managed to say. "What do you want? Why did you want to land those guns——"

John Armod laughed, briefly, and the native house-boy, standing transfixed by the veranda steps, shivered at the sound.

"I was just ten years old when you came to the Armod ranch, Walker. I watched you shoot my father. I've been looking for you ever since. I'm John Armod's son."

Walker said nothing, only gazed with wide, horror-stricken eyes.

"I've come to settle things, Walker. There's a debt outstanding between my family and yours."

"No!" Walker shouted, sinking in his chair. "No! I did not kill John Armod. I fired at his legs. It was Avery. He shot him in the chest. No! I did not kill him!"

"I saw you hit him on the back of the neck when he stooped to fasten his shoe. I saw you fire first. Would you rather shoot it out or use bare hands?"

"It was Avery!" screamed Walker, his fat body quaking and his lips sagging open.

"I intend to settle with Avery as well."

Armod took a step forward and the light glinted again on a revolver barrel.

"Keep still," said a harsh voice. "Keugler, take this man back to his boat. If what you said about the guns is true, Captain, you'll live to regret it. The Imperial—" The speaker checked himself and then went on, "We don't forget interferers. As to any quarrel with Herr Walker, that must be settled some other time. He's in my employ now. That'll be all."

ARMOD took another step forward, slowly, with the awful ponderousness of a breaking sea. Walker screamed again and was abruptly still. Armod felt a revolver grind into his back and he heard Keugler's voice.

"Don't move again, Captain. Back to der beach, march now."

Armod tried to see the man who was giving orders to the trader, the man who had started to say Imperial Government and checked himself, but he kept his face in the shadow and it was evident he did not want to be known. One of the other men bent over Walker and patted his shoulder.

"He is going, Herr Walker. There is no need of fear." The speaker's voice was slightly contemptuous.

But Walker did not reply, only sat huddled in his chair, his lips sagging, his eyes wide. The man bending over him started suddenly and fumbled at the fat figure's breast.

"Walker is dead, Excellency," he announced curtly.

"No names," the harsh voice warned. "Dead, you say?"

A thick-set, black-bearded man pushed forward.

"Bring the light," he snapped and bent over Walker.

Someone called him "doctor" and it came to Armod that there were at least half a dozen men present, all except Keugler, apparently, high in the service of some government. He had more than checkmated Walker when he delivered the guns to Malietoa.

"Shock," said the doctor briefly. "I warned him against excitement. Too much whisky in the tropics. Arteries hard."

"Perhaps it's as well," the harsh voice said. "Take that man away, Keugler. I advise you, Captain, to forget tonight. Otherwise a charge of murder might be sustained against you."

Armod nodded.

"I imagine you'd all be willing to get up in court and swear to it," he said cynically.

Apparently the other had a sense of humor. He appeared to chuckle a little.

"Take him away, Keugler."

With the fat trader pushing a revolver into his back, Armod marched back to the beach where his boat waited him. Before he stepped aboard he turned to the trader and laughed.

"Sorry to bother you so, Keugler. Would you answer some questions for me?"

"I am nod to speak mit you at all."

"Just a few. Has Walker any relations?"

"None that I know of."

"Then when his effects are checked up you might have them sent to me. He robbed my father and killed him years ago. My address will be care of the British Consul in Sydney."

"I will speak mit der—mit der others, Captain. Now I must go."

"One minute more," protested Armod, holding out a hand. "Do you know where Walker's partner, Avery, is?"

"Der last I hear he was in Java—und now I go."

The fat trader waddled back up the beach toward the house, mopping his heated brow again with his handkerchief. The glimmer of his whites faded through the darkness. John Armod stood still for a moment, watching, and then jumped into the whaleboat.

"Give way!"

The oars splashed in the water and the boat drew back from the surf. Across the sea the moon was rising, like a blur of molten silver, picking out every rope and spar on the two anchored ships. Through the water fishes swept and doubled and dived and rose, cutting golden, phosphorescent swaths.

"One," said John Armod aloud and the startled seaman nearest him missed a stroke.

"Beg pardon, sir?" he answered.

"It was nothing," muttered the yellow-haired man.

He lounged in the stern sheets and the night wind brought brief memories back: the ranch-house under a golden moon, the dust from the corrals, hoof-beats in the drowsy noonday, old John Armod bellowing and laughing so loudly as to seem to shake the world.

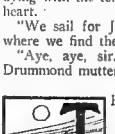
Armod clambered on to the barkentine's deck and was met by an anxious Drummond.

"All right?" questioned the wrinkled, squat sailor.

John Armod nodded. Everything was all right. Walker was dead, not dying as a man would have wished, fighting, but dying with the terror of retribution in his heart.

"We sail for Java, picking up cargoes where we find them," said Armod.

"Aye, aye, sir. We sail for Java," Drummond muttered.



THERE was mystery over the sea that night and the spirit of adventure walked abroad. On the land men conquered, fought, loved, and died. He left his mark. He leveled the mountain and the forest, scratched the earth and brought forth new life. He brought to the desert movement and greenness, builded cities where before only trees had stood, drove roads across continents, constantly pressing his frontier onward, fed his cattle on the fruits of the ages, and raised his altars where before only God had been. All the land bore the imprint of his evolution. But the sea was unstained, after ten thousand years it was unstained. There was not a road driven through it, not a forest of all its forests leveled, not a city could stay on its changing surface. It heaved as untamed and as mysterious as it had heaved on that day when the shores bulked up and the warm rain made it.

The men of the land could build their

walls and shut out life. They could measure time by their old creations, walls their forebears had built. Their history had a beginning and they could plan their future with the small souls of men whose altars are material things. But the sea gypsy had no altars, and for him there was no beginning to history. The sea had always been, before men wrote, before the lands rose and took form. There was no future that could be planned, because the sea gypsy was in touch with ultimate things, monstrous elemental things that rose on occasion and overwhelmed him. His soul was the soul of all the world and the spirit of adventure moved more freely through him because the sea had yet no fences and no chains.

John Armod, dreaming over the after taffrail of the *Lucy Carroll's* poop, was aware that a face rose through the phosphorescence of the shining wake. It was a gentle face, with dark brilliant eyes and red lips, with dark hair that billowed wonderfully about it. It was the face of the woman whom men called the old Buzzard's daughter. Armod laughed, softly, his gray eyes bright, and the chuckle of the salt water under the hull seemed to blend with his humor.

The *Lucy Carroll* went along the coast, past Cape Mulitapuili, past Round Point, and into Safata harbor, which place she reached at dawn. She anchored there for two hours, when a canoe came off.

"From the king," a grinning Samoan shouted up at Armod, and tossed up a long necklace of pink coral with a huge pearl dangling from it as a sort of pendant.

"He got the guns," Armod observed to Drummond.

The mate spat vigorously and watched the canoe speeding back to the shore.

"I'd never 've thought it," he said, half to himself. "There's been half a dozen schooners tried to run guns in, but the squareheads were on to the game an' stopped it. An' 'ere's you, a green 'un, sails right into Apia harbor bold as brass and wants to leave yer guns with the consuls."

Armod laughed.

"I wasn't sure I could get away with it," he admitted. "As it happened, everything fell just right. We'll work out a plan to make Java now."

They went below, laughing together.

The barkentine left Safata harbor after keeping her appointment with King Malietoa's man, and ran east along the tenth parallel south latitude. At last she reached the Santa Cruz Islands where she stopped for water and fresh vegetables, continuing on for the Solomons. It was Armod's intention to trade through the archipelagoes and pay the expenses of this voyage to Java, for seamen ate up stores and the ship needed new gear every day.

The *Lucy Carroll* cruised along the shores of San Cristoval, but had to put to sea when a fleet of war canoes came out from a narrow river mouth and threatened to trap her. Drummond had traded and "blackbirded" through these parts before and he was very cautious.

"Mostly they're just giving a welcome when they wave spears and yell," he said. "But just the same they cut off the whaler *Marquess of Bath* four years ago last August. Killed every man aboard, save the second mate and he got away in the gig. Was picked up by the mission schooner *Salvation* way down south of Cape Surville."

They had better luck at Guadalcanal Island and spent four days there with great profit. From Guadalcanal they ran north to Ysabel, but failed to attract any natives aboard from that savage fragment of land. They spent thereafter nearly a month poking into unexpected bays and river mouths in nearly half a hundred islands, some big, some small, some without names, the greater majority not even charted. At the end of a month, with a fair cargo in the lower holds, they went south through the Louisiades and the D'Entrecasteaux groups and slipped by South Cape at the tip of New Guinea.

At Port Moresby they watered and took fresh stores aboard and Armod sent a draft back to Sydney as payment for the guns, thinking that he had given the scheming merchants enough time to worry. From Port Moresby the *Lucy Carroll* went through Torres Straits and into the Arafura Sea. She stopped at the Tenimber Islands to prospect trade and then curved south and east to the coast of Java.

Followed a week or so of trading and then the barkentine went through the Sunda Strait and arrived at Batavia with full holds. She was foul along the hull with grasses of many seas. Her crew were water-weary and their eyes dull from long gazing across sun-blazed stretches. Armod went ashore to see about a dry-dock and Drummond allowed the men to go so they could work the salt from their bones. The Samoa affair was long away, well-nigh forgotten, as sea gypsys should forget things that happened last cruise in the heat and rush of things happening this cruise.

V

THE *Lucy Carroll* had been in dry-dock a week, natives scraping her hull, before John Armod ran across Avery's trail. He had found that Avery was one of Batavia's leading financiers, a trader and ship owner and a power throughout the Dutch East Indies. He owned a great home outside of the city and his auxiliary steam yacht, the *Deodar*, lying in the harbor, was the last word in comfort and speed. It was hard to get at such a man, hard even to make an appointment with him.

He was surrounded by managers and secretaries, and handled nothing but the biggest deals himself. If a ship captain wanted a cargo he must see one of the managers; if he wanted a charter he must see some other executive. Besides, what was more important, Avery was in Singapore at the precise moment Armod arrived in Java.

Just as Armod was on the verge of sailing to Singapore the little joss of Chance stepped in in a most peculiar manner. Armod was sitting at a marble-topped table in one of Batavia's wine shops, sipping iced gin-and-soda-water and watching the gaily colored throngs pass and repass along the walks.

A square-built, gray-haired man with a battering ram jaw and hard blue eyes entered the shop, glanced swiftly around and then sat opposite the yellow-haired sailor.

"You're Captain Armod?" he growled abruptly, in clean-cut English.

The sailor looked at him curiously and nodded. The other took off his sun-helmet and placed it on the table. A waiter hurried up and went away with an order for straight whisky. The intruder pulled out a case of black cheroots, selected one himself and handed the case across the table. Armod shook his head and pulled a cigar from his own pocket.

"My name's Armod," he answered.

He glanced idly out on the walk again and his eyes twinkled appreciation as a native girl laughed in the face of a plump Dutchman who tried to pinch her arm and received a little kick for his pains. In one corner of the shop a man was laughing uproariously at something the waiter had said. Two immaculate army officials at another table looked shocked and stroked heavy, black mustaches. Armod looked back from the walk to find the stranger's hard eyes boring into him.

"You want to charter your ship?" the stranger was saying.

Armod shrugged. He was willing to do most anything that did not take him too far from Java and Singapore. He had to live and he had to keep his ship busy.

"Maybe," he drawled.

Any sea gypsy would be willing to listen to a proposition. If the terms and the conditions were right; above all, if a prospect of adventure offered, a deal could be made.

"I'm Martin Conway," went on the stranger. He talked in a low, clipped voice as though he begrudged words. "We've heard of you, Captain. You're the man who pulled off that gun-running deal in Samoa a few months back. And I seem to remember something about your being in a South American revolution. The point is, I believe you're the man I want."

Armod shrugged and finished his drink. He blew cigar smoke lazily across the table so that a thin curtain hid his face for a moment.

"What is it? Outside the law?" he then asked.

"Not much. But, if you'd rather not handle such things, I won't bother."

"It depends. I can't take any commission that'd send me away from Java."

"This won't. I want to charter you for one month. Name your own price. My only condition is absolute silence and implicit obedience to orders."

Armod studied his cigar tip and thought. He had had such offers before, mysterious hints given of queer things he was to perform, unlimited money offered for services rendered. He'd have to hear the whole affair first.

"If you know me you'll know my word's good," he said. The other nodded. "Then I'll have to know what the game is. Confidential, that's understood."

Martin Conway hesitated, looked around and then spoke in a still lower voice.

"It's getting a certain man away from Batavia and keeping him away for one month."

"Who is it? Prominent man?"

The other looked at him keenly and drew quick, nervous puffs on his black cheroot.

"Do you have to know?" he muttered under his breath.

"I never handle an affair without complete knowledge."

"All right. I can get you if you talk. It's Jim Crewe, the old Buzzard."

Armod knocked his empty glass to the floor with an abrupt involuntary gesture. He half-rose to his feet, checked himself, and then with an effort sat down again, recovering control. His features wore a mask, save for a shadow behind his gray eyes when he spoke.

"Is the old Buzzard's name Jim Crewe?" he asked. "Crewe? Was he a sailor once?"

"I suppose so." Martin Conway gestured with irritation that such a trivial question should interfere. "I suppose so. Most of the traders hereabouts were sailors."

"Was he ever in Mexico?"

"I don't know. But about my proposition: you're to get hold of Crewe, put him on your ship and keep him away from civilization for one month."

Armod laughed, so coldly and so without mirth that the other man stared at him. Then he lifted his hand and beckoned to the waiter. He ordered a straight gin, double size, and drank it without apparent effort.

"Go on," he said calmly.

Frowning slightly, Martin Conway resumed.

"Crewe's on his yacht——"

"What's her name?"

"The *Nautilus*."

"Go on."

"He's cruising through the Banda Sea with his daughter. He's expected back here within three days and the *Nautilus* will anchor opposite the Crewe mansion on the other side of the harbor. Crewe will stay aboard—he usually does when the ship's in port—and you'll have to take him off. If you're caught you're to take all blame, though I'll do what I can for you. Understand—my name must not appear. I could get a Malay to do this, but the natives talk afterward. Can you trust your men?"

"Absolutely. I never let them know anything anyway." Armod was amused, it seemed, for he chuckled frequently. Sometimes he drummed on the marble top of the table with lazy fingers and once he beckoned the waiter to refill his glass.

"Well," said Martin Conway at the end. "Will you tackle the job?"

"At my own price?"

"At your own price—within reason that is."

"Five thousand—pounds."

"Whew! You come high. That's a bargain then."

"Shake hands." They shook hands and drank together again. Then Armod leaned across the table and grew deadly serious. "I'll do some questioning now."

The other frowned and looked around again.

"I mustn't stay too long," he said. "I'm known in Batavia and something might leak out afterward that I was seen with you."

"Who's hiring you?" Armod demanded. "What do you mean? I said *I* wanted Crewe removed."

"I know you did. I'm asking for the facts." Armod smiled grimly.

"You're a hard nut," Conway growled. "Well, then, I'm confidential man to Walter Avery."

It was hard for John Armod to conceal his elation. The commercial giants were battling, battling with fortunes gained by virtue of that fortune stolen in the long ago, stolen from his father. And he was to come between them. He saw the possibilities of it all in one dazzling flash. He might ruin both men first, before he killed them.

"Weren't Avery and Crewe partners once, shipmates?" he asked.

"I believe so. Why do you ask such futile questions? I'm in a hurry."

"Wait a bit, wait a bit. Does Avery know you've come to me?"

"You flatter yourself." Conway chuckled, despite his irritation. "Avery's got bigger things on his mind than ship captains he hires. He leaves this stuff to me."

"All right. I take it Avery's out for Crewe's blood in some way."

"Blood's right. Crewe'll be smashed higher than the sun. But that's enough. Where can I meet you to settle the thing? Half the money now, tonight. The other half at the end of a month."

"And if there's a row and I get jailed, I'm to stand for that?"

"That's correct. If I thought you were the squealing sort I wouldn't have come to you. But you've the record of playing the game square. That's part of the bargain. I can tell you we'll delay any court action as long as possible—and Avery near controls the courts."

"I'm satisfied; I'll find a way to beat it. Can you be on board my ship—she's in Van Doort's dock—at ten tonight?"

"I'll be there."

Martin Conway rose and replaced his sun-helmet. He lighted a new cheroot,

nodded to Armod and strolled out of the wine shop. Armod laughed and tossed off his replenished glass. Chance! The grinning little joss had come to him, was sitting on his shoulder and handing him the aces to hold. His enemies were delivered into his hand. Because he was a sea gypsy, because he had the nerve to take chances and for the adventure of it sometimes sailed outside the law, all crooks thought he was a crook and demanded his services. Vera, the old Buzzard's daughter——

He didn't dare to think of her just yet. He'd have to figure out what he was going to do later. He wanted her and he wanted her father, each in a different way. Something'd have to go by the board. Now, it didn't look as though the little joss was grinning so hard after all, or handing out so very many aces.

TROLLING back to the *Lucy Carroll*, Armod drew Drummond down into the saloon and gave him a brief outline of the proposed venture. Drummond was pessimistic.

"I've helped get a guy off Devil's Island, down Noumea way, but he didn't talk afterward and tell the French who we were. Here you're aimin' to kidnap a big man, keep him away for a month, and then let him go to call down on us all the Dutch warships in the South. Sounds to me like it means extradition papers, too. Them big birds c'n pull strings in London, Paris and Berlin and I wouldn't give 'alf a quid for your hide if that happens."

"I don't think he'll talk," observed Armod grimly.

His eyes were cold when he said that and hard lines appeared round his mouth. Drummond looked at him sharply and the squat, wrinkled old sailor whistled softly.

"Oh, is this Crewe one of those birds you're chasing over the country to say how-do to?"

"He is."

Armod walked into his cabin and shut the door. Drummond scratched his head and bit a chew from a fresh plug. He felt rather dubious. He didn't want to become known too much as the accomplice of a murderer, even though he had to do as he was told, being paid mate of the barkentine.

At ten o'clock, through the dark night, Martin Conway came walking up the dock side. Armod, now that he was in the game, played according to the rules. Conway didn't want to be recognized as having any dealings with the *Lucy Carroll*. So Armod had the gangway lights extinguished and saw to it that all his crew were ashore in the grog shops. The money changed hands in the deep shadow under the mainmast, Drummond witnessing the transaction. Then Conway turned and walked rapidly away. Nor did Armod ever see him again.

Armod had twenty-five hundred pounds and had given no receipt for it. It would be easy for him to deny having had it, to warp his ship out of dry-dock and sail from Batavia, or even hang around and start legitimate trading. But sea gypsys were not made that way, least of all John Armod. Scoundrels the freelance adventurers might be; blackguards most of them undoubtedly were, godless outlanders with scarce a redeeming feature. But, as a whole, they kept their words to friend or foe. As for Armod, it never entered his head to play a double game with Conway.

He would remove Crewe if it were humanly possible. And he would take good care that Crewe was removed for at least a month. Nothing had been said about returning him safe and sound. After a month was up Armod could sail back to Batavia, alone, and settle with Avery.

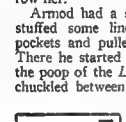
Armod had heard quite a lot about Avery, who appeared to be a lean, thin-lipped man, utterly ruthless in his dealings with natives or white men. He was worth several fortunes and it was rumored even the Dutch deferred to him. Apparently he had no friends—or only one, a wild half-caste Malay woman of great beauty whom he kept with him night and day and seemed to fear a little. Batavia said he had found her starving in an up-country village and made her his mistress, at first against her will. Batavia said she was his sister, or half-sister. Batavia said she was his daughter. But Batavia also said that Avery's espionage system was the finest in the East and that he had removed by death more than one man who had stood in his way. All of which sounded, and probably was, very much exaggerated. At least, so thought Armod.

The *Lucy Carroll* was warped out of dry-dock, resplendent in new paint and scraped and caulked hull. She lay alongside the wharf taking supplies and water aboard when the schooner-yacht *Nautilus* sailed into port. Armod watched her come to anchor, like a fairy ship, daintily lined and tall masted. He thought he saw a

flutter of white on her poop, a flutter of color from a hat, with a blur of dark hair below. But though his pulse hammered, he could not be sure.

He went below and secured his glasses. He could see her now. It was Vera Crewe, all right, as fresh and brilliant and vivid as when he had last seen her in Apia harbor. He watched her clamber down to the dinghy with a stout, gray-headed man. Two able seamen pulled them ashore. He watched her return an hour later and again leave the ship, alone, in the early afternoon with only one seaman to row her.

Armod had a small boat sent overside, stuffed some line and fishhooks in his pockets and pulled halfway to the yacht. There he started fishing. Drummond, on the poop of the *Lucy Carroll* watched and chuckled between expectorations.



IT WAS nearly two hours before the *Nautilus's* boat put out from the shore again. For one bleak moment Armod thought that only the able seaman was in it, but, as it drew nearer, he saw Vera Crewe lounging in the stern sheets turning the pages of a dull-covered magazine. Armod hitched his fishing line round a cleat and skulled his boat across the track of the other. The able seaman with the girl altered his course, after a backward glance over his shoulder. Armod, appearing to be unaware of the other craft, continued sculling. The able seaman scowled and pulled hard on one oar. There was almost a collision.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Armod said, startled, and lifted his sun-helmet. The magazine was lowered and a pair of astonished eyes regarded the yellow-haired sailor. Then recognition dawned and the girl smiled.

"Why, Captain—er—Armod, isn't it? You helped me with Bruges in Apia, didn't you? What a coincidence."

"Yes," said Armod.

The able seaman backed water and then rested on his oars at a word from his mistress. Armod caught the other craft's gunnel and brought his own boat alongside.

"I hardly expected to see you in Batavia," he said, laughing.

"I hardly expected to be here so soon myself," she observed, regarding him with sudden gravity. "We had to return on unexpected business—the old Buzzard and I." She laughed gaily.

"I didn't expect you'd remember me." Armod grinned.

"I would know those great shoulders anywhere, and that light hair."

"Guess that's so; I'm quite a hulk. Which way did you come, through Torres Straits?"

"No, not so far south as that. I started from Apia on a pleasure cruise through the Fijis and the Gilberts. But my father—the old Buzzard—sent me word at Suva to pick him up from one of his plantations on Viti Levu. He was resting there. Someone was interfering with the stock market or something and he had to rush back here. Then we went back to Singapore again and up to Saigon. We've come from Saigon."

"Quite a little jaunt," said Armod.

His eyes caressed the girl. She flushed slightly, aware of his scrutiny.

"I've been on quite a jaunt myself, through all the islands, trading a bit," Armod added. "Won't you come and look over my ship?"

She remembered that after all this man was almost a stranger, and a merchant captain. She was the daughter of one of the East's richest men. It wouldn't look well for her to go with him at such short acquaintance. She was a good sport, but in her home town she had to keep up certain appearances.

"I'm afraid I can't just now," she said. "Perhaps you'd care to come aboard tonight, after dinner, and meet father? He's always interested in traders. Tries to pump them on new prospects for a trading station."

"I'd like to come, Miss Crewe. I give you my word I would."

No one could mistake the sincerity in the clear gray eyes. Armod had forgotten for the moment that this girl was the daughter of the man he intended to kill.

She recovered a little of her poise and laughed.

"I warn you the old Buzzard will talk shop. He's a glutton for information."

"I'll chance it. Do you dress?"

"A master mariner is allowed to wear uniform," she said graciously. "Come about nine o'clock."

He nodded and looked immensely pleased. His eyes caressed her again and she severely ordered the sailor to row on. The able seaman pushed the dinghy from Armod's boat and took up his oars again.

"Good-by until nine, then," she called back as the crafts drew apart.

Armod lifted his hand to show he had heard, but did not say good-by. He sent his boat shooting back to the *Lucy Carroll* with great powerful strokes, forgetting all about fishing. Elation thrilled him. Now he knew what he had been looking for all these years. Not so much did it seem that he wanted Walker, Avery and Crewe. It was a woman, the one woman, this woman, Vera.

Half-unconsciously he lifted his deep voice in a crooning song of the sea, and the sound, drifting over the harbor, caught the girl's ear. She half-turned to look and her eyes brooded. She had heard tales of this Armod, the sea gypsy, wild tales whispered among seamen. He was an outlander, a sailor as her father had been a sailor, and her mother's father. The sea strain in her tingled to the song that drifted slowly to her ears. She had often thought of such a man, yellow-haired, big, adventuring, like those old sailors in the beaked ships of long ago.

VI

AT EIGHT o'clock Armod was dressing in his cabin below the *Lucy Carroll's* poop. He put on his best uniform, his best cap. He had brushed his hair until the light of the oil lamp sent shimmers of gold glancing through the yellow. He tied his tie with care, and, as an afterthought, slipped a small revolver in his hip pocket. After all, he had to remember that Crewe was his enemy.

At five minutes to nine he slapped Drummond on the shoulder, walked to the ship's side and dropped down, hand over hand, to the waiting boat. Drummond leaned over the rail and watched him fade into the starlight, the harbor water splitting in tiny waves before him. He headed straight for the yacht, brilliantly lighted, her white hull glimmering through the mistiness like a moth at rest.

Armod brought his boat up to the gangway and made fast. He went up the steps slowly and a young officer stepped from beside a lantern to meet him.

"I'd like to see Miss Crewe," said Armod calmly.

The officer glanced at the uniform and then at the mighty shoulders and muscled throat. He grew respectful.

"I'll tell her, Captain. Did you have an appointment?"

"I did. Is Mr. Crewe aboard?"

"Just finishing dinner; he eats late. Wait here."

The officer hurried away and came back almost immediately with Vera Crewe behind him. She held out a hand and smiled.

"I'm glad you came, Captain," she said. "Father's having company tonight, later. I didn't know or I'd have warned you. But it doesn't matter. Come along to the dining-room."

Armod doffed his cap and walked beside her. The young officer at the gangway head looked after them and grinned. Lucky to be a fine looking man with a command and a gold braided uniform. Well, Miss Crewe had turned down better men.

The dining saloon had dark paneled bulkheads, lighted by lamps set in silver gimbals, one to each panel. Spotless linen covered the table. Silver gleamed at every turn. A steward, immaculate in white duck, held open the door. The stout, gray-haired man sitting at the table head rose and smiled.

He had pleasing brown eyes with laughter wrinkles in the corners. He wore his dress suit with dignity and the hand he held out was firm and white, not flabby.

"Captain," he said, "I'm pleased to meet you. My daughter mentioned you might come. By the way, I didn't catch the name, dear."

"Armod, daddy, Captain Armod."

Armod, standing rigid and still, felt the other's hand tense in his own. The famous pearl buyer and trader leaned forward and stared. Then abruptly he fumbled in his pocket and produced a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. He stared again and then steadied himself by gripping the table edge. He swayed a trifle.

"Not John Armod, by any chance, or a relation of John Armod's? Armod who had a ranch in Mexico."

"His son," said Armod softly. "They do say I look like my father."

Crewe sat down heavily.

"What's the matter, dad?" his daughter cried, alarmed. "Captain, have you met father before?"

"You'll hear in a minute, Vera. Won't you sit down, Captain. This is a shock."

"I'd imagine so," Armod observed dryly.

He took a seat and gave his cap to the steward. Then with deliberation he bit the end from a cigar, lighted it and blew smoke at the deckhead, his eyes never leaving the other man's face. Silently the girl

sank to a chair, her puzzled eyes darting from face to face.

"I've wondered if this day would come," started the pearl buyer shakily. "I've wondered and prayed for it and dreaded it. Do you know, Armod, by rights, this all belongs to you?"

"I've come to collect."

"Father, what is it all about? Are you ill?"

No one paid attention to her. The steward retired from the room at a gesture from the old man. Armod blew smoke at the deckhead again and waited, his gray eyes narrowing a little.

"Armod, I wronged your father. I suppose you know?"

"That's why I'm here."

The other took out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead. He needed time to think. This was a shock, a man that was dead rising up young and virile again to confront him, demanding payment. What could he say? What could he do?

"You won't believe me, but twice I've sent men to Mexico to locate you. I regretted what I helped to do a thousand times since that night. I knew your father had a son and I swore I'd repay. I didn't shoot him. At least I can say that. I didn't fire when the others did."

"They all say that," said John Armod cynically.

The girl stared with wide eyes and wondered if she were dreaming.

"Yes, I suppose they do." The pearl-buyer smiled shakily and mopped his brow again. "Well, I'll do what I can to make good. I'll get an accountant in the morning and check up and turn things over to you. All except a little for my daughter. I made it all with what I got from your father."

"You can't bring him back. You cut him off in the full tide of his life. You didn't give him a chance, not a chance; shot an unarmed man and looted the ranch-house over the head of an orphan boy."

Crewe did not speak, only sank his head in his hands and bent his back. His daughter, moved by some impulse she could not define, crossed to her father and placed an arm round him. She stared at the sailor and her eyes were flashing.

"You beast! To come here as my guest and insult father like that! Go away. I never want to see you again."

John Armod hesitated. He looked at the girl and, despite his cold rage, could not keep the admiration out of his eyes. He worshipped her white throat and arms with his eyes. He wanted her. He could live out his life in superb happiness with her by his side. But he could see now, clearly, it meant condoning the ancient wrong, foregoing payment and holding as a friend a man who had helped to shoot his father in cold blood. The Armod pride and sense of the fitness of things surged up in him. His teeth clicked hard together. His lips set. The caress of his eyes went away like a lamp shut off. He stood up.

"I'm collecting, Crewe, in my own way. If you didn't shoot, you agreed to it. You were a man, not a boy. I've settled with Walker. Next you get yours. Then I'll fix Avery. I'm sorry—in a way—you've got a girl. But my honor is involved. Your money isn't worth a damn to me. Give me my father back."

Crewe still kept his ashen face between his hands and rocked sideways.

"It's true," he whimpered. "I've tried to atone, but I can't, I can't. It's true!"

"Go away," said the girl. She was crying now though she hardly realized what for. "Go away and never let me see you again. I might have liked you. Go away."

John Armod strode from the saloon, jamming his cap on his head. He turned at the door and stood for a moment, massive and menacing.

"My father met it like a man, Crewe," he drawled insolently. "You might do the same. We found seven bullets in him and he got them all before he went down."

Crewe lifted his gray head for a moment and stared. Red dyed his cheeks. That, too, was true. The old John Armod had met his end like a man, facing it, uttering his bull-like fighting roar and going forward to meet his foes. Any sea gypsy should meet it that way, and once Crewe had adventured along the sea gypsy trail. He stiffened and slowly the grief and shame ebbed from his face.

"Thank you, Armod," he said with dignity.

Armod only laughed and slammed the door behind him, leaving the father to explain to his daughter. Outside, in the alleyway that led to the main deck, Armod came on the steward. The man brushed against him rudely, having heard most of what had gone on inside the room. Armod laughed again and swept one hand aside, as a lazy, good-natured bear might have done. The steward staggered and fell on his face, cursing. Armod went on to the gangway, thrust aside the young offi-

cer and went down to his boat. He unfastened the painter and dug deep with the oars. Above, on the yacht's deck, the officer rubbed his shoulder and glared his wrath. Armod went on through the starlight, growing to a dim blot, laughing still in a harsh way. He had put by this woman, the one woman, and his honor was intact.

DRUMMOND was still leaning over the *Lucy Carroll's* rail when his captain returned. The mate was surprised. He pulled out a massive watch and examined the dial with care.

"Only an hour! Say, there was never a thing c'd keep me from a skirt when I was doing that sort of thing. What happened?"

"I guess I won't marry her after all," said Armod, taking two half hitches with the boat painter round the rail. "And don't ask questions!" He walked aft, stopping at the saloon scuttle. "Come and drink," he called over his shoulder.

Drummond spat overside, hitched up his belt and followed his captain, scratching his tanned cheek the while and muttering to himself.

"We'll take Crewe tonight," said Armod, over glasses of gin. "You and me'll pull it. We'll leave here at one and board the yacht. They're keeping a gangway watch, so we'll go easy. The main saloon seems to be for'ard of a thing they call the dining-room, and I guess the cabins open onto it. Pack a gun. I get Crewe or I clean out his ship. Finish that drink. I'm taking lots tonight!"

Drummond drained his glass and set it on the table. He watched Armod tip the square-faced bottle and pour out the colorless liquid. Then he spat and frowned.

"If she turned you down you needn't hit the booze," he remarked.

Armod looked at him and laughed.

"She didn't turn me down; I turned her down."

"You've got the cheek."

"Fact. You can't marry a girl when you're bucking her old man."

"No?" Drummond scratched his ear and thought. "No, I guess you can't. Do you have to buck her old man?"

Armod put down his glass and stared at his mate.

"He killed my father."

"Course. Aye, of course—but killin' 'im ain't bringing the old man back. Did he know you?"

"I look like my father."

"An' what did 'e say?"

"Was sorry and all that. Said he'd tried to find me and wanted to return everything he'd stolen. Did I ever tell you they looted my house, my father's house?"

"Aye, you mentioned it once. Well, I guess you feel pretty bad about it."

Armod did not reply. He finished his drink and looked into the empty glass. He bit the end from a cigar and, lighting it, lounged back in his chair and gazed moodily at the deckhead. Drummond sighed, spat into the cuspidor and went on deck.

At one o'clock the two men dropped down into the boat trailing alongside. They had changed into dark serge, on Drummond's advice, and except for the slight phosphorescent wash from the oars, crept almost invisibly toward the schooner-yacht. It lay like a dark moth on the face of the harbor, only two lights visible aboard, a riding mast-head light and a light at the gangway.

Armod steered to the side opposite the gangway and skirted the lean hull looking for a place to board. She was too high for them to reach from the boat and there appeared to be no ropes trailing. There was nothing for it but to try the anchor cables or the gangway. Armod decided to investigate the gangway first. The anchor cables meant a difficult scrambling climb with the chance that some of the crew might be on the fo'c's'le-head.

The lantern at the gangway head shed a sickly yellow light down the steps but left a dark shadow behind them. Armod brought the boat silently into this shadow and then Drummond and he waited breathlessly, straining their ears to catch any sound abroad in the sticky dark. At last they heard someone cough gently far above. Then Drummond caught the vague glow of a cheroot and touched Armod's arm. Presently they could make out the head and shoulders of a man leaning over the ship's bulwarks above them. He appeared not to have heard their approach or to be aware of their presence.

Presently he coughed again and moved along for'ard and the listeners below caught the sound of a cane chair creaking.

"Sitting down for a while," whispered Drummond. "Didn't think there was many good sailors'd go on yachts."

Armod grinned and brought the boat up to the gangway with a gentle thrust against

the ship's side. Drummond made it fast so that it still floated in the shadow.

Both men crept up the steps. At the gangway head, directly under the lantern, they crouched and listened. The cane chair still creaked as though the resting man was uncomfortable and trying to rearrange himself. They lay flat on their stomachs and crawled over the gangway grating to the yacht's deck. Silently as any native, they moved along the shadow.

The gangway watch was sprawled in a chair about fifteen feet away, smoking lazily and gazing with dreaming eyes over the dark water to where Batavia loomed and twinkled in the distance. He never knew what it was that rose from the deck beside him, hit him under the ear, clapped a cloth to his mouth and lowered him into the chair from which he had half started up. Drummond bound him with some cord they had brought along and Armod gagged him effectively. Then they went on to the saloon.

They found the door hooked back for the sake of coolness and almost stumbled over the stretched figure of a Malay sleeping across the threshold.

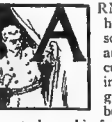
"Must be a servant, the girl's or the man's," Drummond suggested, in a whisper. "Shall I scotch him?"

"No unnecessary violence," Armod whispered back, shaking his head.

He stepped over the Malay and went on, Drummond cautiously following. The doors of the cabins all opened on to the saloon and all were open. So were the cabin ports, to judge by the faint breeze of hot air that circulated through each door.

Armod peered into the first cabin and his eyes now accustomed to the gloom after facing the lantern light, made out a portly, black-mustached man in the broad bunk. Over a chair hung a white uniform. Armod retreated and stared into the next room. He found two cabins unoccupied and two in which were officers. Then he came upon a bathroom and after that to a cabin larger than any he had seen. A thin curtain hung in the open doorway and he lifted it with care. For a long time he gazed at a blur of white face haloed with dark hair, one bare arm hanging over the bunk. Armod let the curtain drop into place and motioned Drummond away. They crossed the saloon and found another large cabin with a curtained doorway.

Armod was about to draw the cloth aside when a faint sound, as though someone had sighed, caught his ear. He listened intently, then drew aside the curtain just a fraction. There was a dim light in the cabin, and the faint sound as of sighing continued. Armod peered about the saloon and then drew back the curtain so that he could see within. Crewe sat on the edge of his bunk, his head in his hands, staring at the carpet. On a table nearby a small night lamp gave out a little glow that barely kept the shadows at bay.



ARMOD groped behind him with one hand and squeezed Drummond's arm. Then he swept the curtain aside and burst into the cabin. The gray-haired man on the bunk looked up with abrupt alarm, his face lined and aged, and then he slipped to the deck.

"Do you want me, Armod?" he said in a toneless voice.

The yellow-haired sailor did not answer, or perhaps the look in his eyes was answer enough. Crewe seemed to wilt a little and the lines on his face deepened.

"Think of my daughter, Armod. Won't you——?"

"That's enough. You're coming with me."

Drummond took cord from his pocket and advanced a step. Crewe changed with astonishing rapidity from a crushed, dispirited object to a blazing man.

"All right, if you insist on fighting I'll fight!" he shouted. "Damn you, Armod, I've tried to play clean ever since——"

Then Drummond was on him, passing cord swiftly round his knees, and Armod had him by the throat shutting off his breath. There was a quiet pad of bare feet and the curtain of the cabin swept back. Drummond whipped round, tense, a revolver in his hand. The Malay servant stood in the doorway, one hand on the hilt of a kris thrust in his sarong, the other holding the curtain. He remained motionless for a brief moment and then the kris came out with a tiny whickering noise. Drummond sighted with his gun.

"Not that," Armod snapped, and kicked aside at his mate's wrist.

He met the Malay's rush with a fist shooting straight from the shoulder and the brown man went down with a split cheek, his wavy blade ripping Armod's shirt from waist to breast and just slitting the skin beneath.

Armod ignored the wound and, stooping, heaved up the bound and helpless

Crewe to his shoulder. He started for the door and was stopped on the threshold by a pale-faced fury with a hint of terror in her eyes, a thin, silk kimono round her shoulders.

"What are you doing? Father! Put father down, you beast. Feusel—what have you done to Feusel?" Her wide eyes took in the form of the inert Malay.

"Get away, miss. You'll be hurt," said Drummond.

Armod took a step forward until Crewe's dangling legs touched his daughter's clothes.

"What are you doing?" she repeated, terrified now, almost screaming. "Father! Have you killed him?"

Armod shook his head and pushed her aside. She clung to his arm and he dragged her into the saloon, his face gray, his lips set in a hard line.

"Bring her along," he finally snapped to Drummond.

The mate hesitated, then shrugged and lifted the girl over his shoulder, holding one great hand across her mouth. By then the ship was roused. Someone called to know what was the matter. Lights sprang up. Along the main deck a steward pounded. Armod met him in the saloon doorway and pushed him so violently he went reeling to the scuppers.

Before anyone could stop them the two men with their burdens were at the gangway head and starting down the steps. They clambered into the boat, Drummond holding the girl, and Armod pulled clear and guided into the darkest shadows. Then slowly, so that the phosphorescent flashes would not give him away, he pulled for the *Lucy Carroll*.

"Do you think anyone recognized you?" Drummond asked.

Armod laughed harshly, recklessness in the sound.

"I don't care. Don't think they did—except for the Malay, and he's out for an hour yet. We'll be at sea."

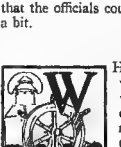
They reached the barkentine and Armod went up the rope ladder awkwardly, carrying Crewe over his shoulder. Then Drummond came with the girl. He had to lash her legs and arms to prevent her kicking clear and swimming away, and had had his hands full to prevent her screaming and calling out.

The men had been warned to stand by and Drummond went for'ard immediately to rout them out. There was only a faint wind blowing, scarcely enough to swell the sails, so one of the whaleboats was launched and six men helped the breeze to carry the barkentine to sea.

Meanwhile the schooner-yacht across the harbor was in uproar. Over the water came faint shouts and calls. Lights glinted through the night. A boat left for the shore and cut a phosporescent swath. Armod laughed harshly as he watched. He might have managed the abduction very much better, in a more silent way. His own impatience to have it done with was likely to check him before he was fully started. And the girl? He had told Drummond to bring her in a momentary spasm of anger. He wished he hadn't. She'd be a nuisance and a witness. He could not get rid of her very well, as he intended getting rid of her father.

The *Lucy Carroll* slipped out of Batavia and felt the brisker wind of the open sea. She heeled slightly and Armod called his boat inboard. Even if the Malay recovered enough to give a description it would be an hour or more before pursuit could be organized. Then there was always to be remembered Martin Conway's assurance that the officials could be held in check for a bit.

VII



WHEN the *Lucy Carroll* was headed north and west, steering for the coast of Sumatra, Armod went down to his captives in the saloon. They sat next to each other in swivel chairs and while Armod was removing Crewe's gag the girl stormed at him, tears in her eyes.

"You can't do this! You can't take us away like this. There'll be warships after you, Captain Armod. Don't you realize what you are doing? You're nothing better than a common blackmailer holding us prisoners. I suppose this is your idea of repaying my father for that silly old affair. He didn't kill your father. Is it ransom you want?"

Drummond came down the companion from the poop just then.

"Put Miss Crewe in a cabin, Drummond, and unlash those cords," Armod said, over his shoulder.

"Aye, aye, sir," said Drummond and he picked up the raging girl and took her from sight.

Armod leaned forward, sitting half on the saloon table.

"I've got you, Crewe, and I'm keeping

you here for quite a while. I want you to understand just what my settlement is. I was paid five thousand pounds by a certain man to keep you out the way for one month."

"That damned swine Avery!" Crewe sputtered. "He's the man you want, Armod. And you help him smash me. He tried it once before. He'll ruin me in a month unless I'm at my office."

Armod laughed and reached across the table for the cigar box.

"So I judged. I'm letting him ruin you. Perhaps I'll let you return to Batavia at the end of a month to taste defeat. Then I'll kill you. Or I'll kill you soon and have done with it. After you're disposed of I'll fix Avery."

"But, you fool," Crewe protested, "don't you see? If Avery smashes me it's your money he's getting, the money I was going to turn back to you? You're throwing millions away. If you want revenge let me go back to Batavia and I'll smash Avery for you and turn over the lot, winnings included."

"Do you think I could trust you after what I saw one night in Mexico?"

"I'm not that sort, Armod. Before God, I'm not that sort. I was a kid then, little more, scarce twenty-two. Walker and Avery talked me into joining them. Not that I want to crawl out. I should have known better, but they were older men and I was mad for adventure. I was with your father one long voyage when he was pirating. The three of us left him in Samoa and had to leave our share of the loot behind. Walker and Avery told me we'd collect it some day. I was about seventeen then, and I stayed with the two of them all the years, trading, blackbirding—oh, we did some rotten things; I'll admit—until we heard your father was ranching in Mexico. Then we came to collect, but the thing got away from me. Walker and Avery ran it.

"When it was over, that night, I saw what a young fool I'd been and I quit. I went with the other two down to Fiji and we divided up what we'd robbed you of. I didn't dare go back and find you because I was afraid, afraid I'd be hung or something. I went into trading for myself, married. I'm rich now. And it's all yours. Twice I've sent men to locate you. Won't you believe me? Have you always lived clean and good and within the law?"

"No matter about that," drawled Armod, puffing his cigar. "Had you fought my father man to man, or given him a gun and shot it out, I wouldn't give a damn. But there were three of you, with other men outside, and he was unarmed."

"I'm not afraid to die myself," Crewe pleaded desperately, "but my daughter mustn't starve. Avery'll smash me and there'll be nothing left.

Armod shrugged and stared steadily at the bulkhead.

"I'll see she gets enough to live on. Maybe I'll give you a fair chance to fight it out. That's enough for now."

He came to his captive and lifted him and carried him into one of the cabins, laying him on a bunk and locking the door. Then he went up on the poop.

Drummond met him at the scuttle and touched his shoulder.

"There's a pretty fast packet following us, sir."

"Following us?"

Armod felt a slightly sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach for a moment; he did not relish several years in a jail in the interior of Java. He strode aft and peered through the night astern, where he could just dimly make out the outlines of a small, yacht-like craft following almost dead in the *Lucy Carroll's* wake. It did not look like a warship or like any craft of the harbor authorities. Armod bit his lip and turned to stare at Drummond.

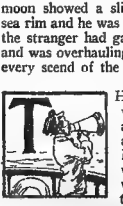
"Get a gun for me and one for yourself. I'm not spending any time in a Dutch pest-house."

"Nor me," said Drummond grimly.

He went away and came back after a while with two cartridge belts and holstered revolvers. Armod buckled one on and frowned thoughtfully.

"Pile on all she'll carry," he ordered. "Tell the men to stand by."

Drummond jumped for the for'ard taff-rail to shout orders. Armod chewed at the butt of his cigar and watched the ship astern. He was still watching when the moon showed a sliver of light above the sea rim and he was vaguely alarmed to find the stranger had gained more than a mile and was overhauling the *Lucy Carroll* with every scend of the warm swell.



THE barkentine might as well have tried to run away from a sea bird as from the ship astern. By the time the moon was high the stranger was off the quarter and then level. She sheered in toward the *Lucy Carroll*,

"Ship ahoy! Are you the *Lucy Carroll?*" someone shouted from her poop.

"Aye! Who are you?" roared back Armod.

"Yacht *Deodar* out of Batavia. Heave to. Mr. Avery wants to board."

Armod stiffened and his hands gripped hard on the rail. Avery wanted to board. This was upsetting all the plans. But he'd like to meet Avery, just out of curiosity and because he intended to kill him as soon as Crewe was smashed. Anyhow, how could he prevent Avery boarding? His yacht could run rings round the barkentine.

"What does he want to board for?" called Armod.

"Are you Captain Armod?"

"Aye."

"Then you ought to know."

"Heave to, Drummond," said Armod quietly.

The mate spat aside and nodded. The *Lucy Carroll* slowed her mad pace across the heaving tropic sea. The *Deodar* sheered even nearer and in the moonlight Armod saw that her rail swarmed with dark-skinned men, Malays, Javanese, and here and there light glistened on steel. Aft on the yacht's poop several white-clothed figures grouped and directed things. Armod's jaw came up and his eyes frosted. This was not right. The yacht was almost grazing the barkentine's side instead of lowering a boat as she should have done. He suspected a trap.

"Drummond!" he called, loosening his gun in the holster, "get the men standing to repel boarders. Something fishy——"

It was too late. The ships came together with a surge and dark Malays swarmed over the *Lucy Carroll's* side, lashing the two ships fast.

Armod raced to the poop companion.

"Get off my ship!" he roared. "By God, I'll shoot!"

He could hear Drummond protesting, too. Then he was aware a white-clothed figure was approaching through the Malays, followed by two other men. They all came up the companion and Armod met them at the top, angry and shaking with passion that his ship should be invaded.

"Captain Armod," snapped the leading man.

Armod peered at him and saw a lean, beak-nosed individual with high cheek-bones and bright, cold eyes. The mouth below was big and cruel and the jaw squared off in a sullen sort of way.

"I'm Walter Avery," the man went on. Blood tingled through Armod's veins till it seemed he was on fire. His judgment went like a flash and two thousand years of berserk ancestry clamored in him.

"Then get off my ship, damn you! I'll settle with you when I get good and ready. Get off!"

His great hands shot out, one of them dropping the revolver it held, and he had the notorious merchant and ex-sailor by the scrawny throat. One of the other white men tore at Armod's shoulders, trying to loosen his grip. The other man shouted down to the Malays. Avery himself heaved and kicked, but, strong man though he was, he felt as helpless as a lump of clay in the hands of a gorilla. He felt himself growing limp, almost felt the blackness crawling over his brain. He tried to think what this attack was for—and then Malays piled over Armod, their hands throttling him, their knees digging into his back.

He uttered short roars of anger, bull-like roars that started Drummond and the rest of the crew fighting madly on their own. All the ship was in a turmoil, little knots of men staggering all over the decks. But the knot on the poop was biggest. Black men and white-clothed men mingled impartially and above it, breaking forth now and then like a rock from the sea, a yellow-haired head and blazing gray eyes.

THE thing finished at last when a Malay used the hilt of his kris and Armod went down like a tree falls, massive even in defeat. The rest of the barkentine's crew was already under control, a few stunned, all bound hand and foot. The Malays had used no steel and no guns had been fired. Armod was lashed and double-lashed, as they might have lashed a bull, and Walter Avery was carried to one of the cane chairs that were always on the poop in fine weather. One white man gently massaged his mangled throat while the other went below to try to find some whisky. Then orders were shouted and the yacht *Deodar* cast off. The *Lucy Carroll* proceeded on a course that would take her across the Java Sea to the coast of Borneo.

When Armod came to he found himself slumped in one of the saloon chairs, the same one Crewe had occupied earlier in the night—or rather morning, since it was now nearly four-thirty. Drummond was slumped in another chair beside him and

walking up and down the saloon was Avery, sticking plaster across a scratch on his face, his throat looking red and swollen, cold anger alight in his eyes. Standing near the foot of the companion that led to the poop deck was another white man, a sleek, fat-faced man with a tiny black mustache and a brilliant blue tie fastening his silk shirt.

Avery stopped at last in front of Armod.

"Awake, eh?" he wheezed. "What the devil's the matter with you?"

The effort of speaking appeared to be painful for he winced as each word came and his hand went half-involuntarily to his throat. Armod blinked and remembered and tried to grin.

"What the devil's the matter?" Avery insisted, his voice rising. "No need to attack me. I came after you to get some papers Crewe carries in a body belt with him. Wanted to leave an agent of mine with you to see there was no let-up in the plans."

"You don't know me," muttered Armod, his eyes burning.

"Never seen you before. You're Captain Armod, aren't you? Then what the devil's the idea? You look like someone I used to know, it seems. I wanted to leave my agent because it's been reported to me you're sweet on Crewe's girl and I can't have you weakening. I intend to marry her some day, I hope, but I'll have to smash her father first."

"Let go these lashings," Armod demanded, his voice still a little thick.

"Presently, presently," said Avery, frowning. "I can't have your great hands sticking in my windpipe again. Where are the keys to the cabins here? Crewe's in one, I presume."

"It wasn't in the agreement I should stand for this boarding," Armod said. "I agreed to keep Crewe out of the way for a month, that's all."

"I know, I know. But I forgot those papers. Which room is Crewe in? I don't want to break the door."

It was evident to Armod that the Crewes, father and daughter, had kept quiet on hearing the voice of Avery.

"Let me go," he growled.

Avery motioned impatiently to the fat-faced man with the tiny mustache. He stepped forward and produced a penknife.

"Are you over this attacking business, Captain? You might explain that."

"I will," grated Armod, rising and rubbing his arms. "I'm John Armod, son of John Armod of Mexico." He laughed.

Avery stopped short in the walking up and down the saloon he had recommenced. His eyes grew to points of light, tiny points that seemed to bore like fire. His great jaw spread and set. One of his hands moved and then he was holding a revolver at Armod's stomach.

"So that's it. The old man had a son. Crewe warned me once, but I laughed at him. What did you intend to do?"

"Kill you. You killed my father." Armod was quite calm now, rubbing some of the places where skin had been rubbed from him and which he could reach through his ripped clothing.

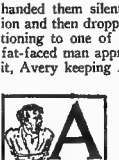
"I imagine." Avery's voice was dry. "Well, well, so you found us all. I suppose you fell quick for Conway's suggestion about Crewe. He was one of us, you know."

"I'm going to finish him."

"Good. I'll be very obliged. But you'll have to leave me alone in future. I'll give you back the amount I took from your father's place. Might even consider taking you in as partner in my firm. I could use you. But more of that later—I'll watch you in the meantime. Now, where's Crewe? I always handle one thing at a time."

Armod stared, rage mounting in him that this man should take the matter so easily. No regret and anguish as Crewe had shown. No fear such as had beset Walker. It was very probable, as both Crewe and Walker had claimed, that Avery had been the moving spirit in the whole thing. A cold man, driving ruthlessly and without a heart to whatever goal he had set up for himself.

Armod crossed slowly to the small locker against the saloon bulkhead and took down the cabin keys from a nail. He handed them silently to Avery's companion and then dropped to a chair again, motioning to one of the locked doors. The fat-faced man approached it and unlocked it, Avery keeping Armod covered.



A PURPLE-FACED, raging Crewe burst into speech as the door swung open.

"Damn you, Avery, I heard you were at the bottom of this. I'll get you some time!"

"Drag him out," snapped Avery,

"Thanks, Armod, for tying him up," he added.

The fat-faced white man dragged Crewe roughly from the bunk and into the saloon, propping him against a stanchion near Avery. Armod's eyes narrowed a trifle and his lips went thin and almost bloodless. He was helpless now, and in the presence of two of his enemies.

"May I smoke?" he asked.

Avery's eyes flickered back from Crewe and he nodded curtly.

"You may. Don't try to pull a gun. Did you search him, Watkins?"

The fat-faced man grinned and nodded. Armod pulled out a cigar from his pocket and started smoking. Crewe glared at him.

"I suppose you're satisfied, Armod," he said bitterly. "You've got me into this and you've delivered my daughter helpless to this man. He's a dog and he's wanted her for years. Damn you, your father never fought women!"

"Your daughter? Is Miss Vera aboard?" broke in Avery, his eyes lighting.

He paused to rub his sore throat and sent his glance flickering along the saloon, then noticed the cabin with its door still locked. He nodded to his satellite and the cabin interior was exposed, showing an indignant Vera Crewe framed in the doorway, flushed of face and with hands clenched so tightly the knuckles were white.

Avery smiled, a slow, cruel smile, and he bowed gracefully.

"Miss Vera, this is an unexpected pleasure. I didn't expect Captain Armod would be so kind as to bring you along. He disobeyed instructions, for nothing was said about you, but I'm thankful he did."

"Do you intend keeping my father and myself prisoners?" she demanded.

"Guests, Miss Vera, guests, not prisoners. You may have anything you desire. I'm glad I decided to make this visit on Captain Armod myself instead of sending Conway——"

"Damn you, Avery, you leave her alone. I'll kill you if any harm comes to her," snarled Crewe, struggling so with his bonds that the veins of his throat swelled like cords.

Armod blew smoke lazily at the deckhead and decided his chances were more promising. With many matters to divert him, Avery was the more easily overcome. But the hint of forthcoming abuse of the girl sent Armod's blood on fire again, though this time he had perfect control.

"I wouldn't hurt her for the world, Crewe," Avery said. "Indeed, if you would only consent to me as a son-in-law, we might forget all this enmity and go in together. Just think what it would mean: control of the Dutch East Indies, control of the China coast. Man, together we could run this quarter of the world."

"I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man!" burst out the girl.

In her mortification she stamped her foot and went crimson.

"Well, we'll talk of it later," smiled Avery. He motioned to a chair. "Won't you sit down?"

The girl dropped into the seat and covered her face with her hands. Armod watched her keenly and knew that under the stress of the last few hours her self-confidence and calm ability to take care of herself had ebbed away.

"I'd sooner she'd marry a snake than you, Avery," Crewe was biting out between his teeth. "By God, you'll pay for this!"

"When I leave this ship I'm turning you over to the natives I brought with me," Avery shrugged. "I think, after hearing the identity of our Captain Armod, I'll give them his ship and his really magnificent physique, too. I can't have any son of old John Armod on my track all my life. The old man was tough enough and he'd seen his best days when I knew him."

Armod met the cruel eyes with his clear gray ones.

"I'll get you, Avery, if it takes me twenty years," he drawled insolently. "And if I'm dead I'll get you just the same."

Avery rubbed his tender throat and scowled.

"My yacht takes me off at dawn. She's circling back to meet us now I expect. Then I'll turn you all over," he promised. "My men'll be glad of the loot here and some of your heads would look good in canoe houses. I'll ask them to make it last longer for you, Armod. Burning bamboo splinters in the live flesh, under the finger-nails for a start. Well, take that belt from Crewe, Watkins, and we'll get ready to leave. Call some of the men down. The girl comes with me."

"You swine," the despairing Crewe burst out. "My God, Avery, you can't be so damned small. Let her alone; let me go and I'll turn over to you every cent I possess. I swear I will——"

"It all belongs to me, you said once, Crewe," Armod could not for the life of him help adding.

The anguished father bent his head.

Armod felt sorry for him, the first touch of sorrow he had known while trailing Walker, Avery and Crewe. Perhaps the gray-haired trader was sincere when he said he had tried to make amends. If so he appeared to be the only one of the three with any such feelings.

"I wouldn't marry you, not if you were the last man in the world," the girl cried, passionately. "I hate you. And if you try to take me away I'll kill myself."

Avery permitted himself a grin.

"I'd like you to come willingly, Vera, but, if you won't, I'll have to use force. And I want you to be nice to me when I get back to Batavia. You won't mind living in my house, will you? You'll be nice anyway when I get through." He finished with a trace of a snarl.

Armod shivered, the cold rage mounting again. He would tear Avery limb from limb when next he laid hands on him.

The man Watkins, after tearing off Crewe's pajama jacket and unbuckling the body belt beneath, had gone on deck and shouted something. Now he came back into the saloon, followed by four huge natives in dirty cloth sarongs. One of them was a chief, to judge by his elaborate ornaments and gold-hilted kris. Avery addressed him once as rajah, and held a long conversation with him in the native tongue. Crewe could understand it and apparently the girl could, for she screamed and ran to her father, throwing arms round his neck and kissing him.

"Oh, Daddy, Daddy, I won't leave you! I won't let him take me away!" She was only a little girl, afraid and alone.

Armod half rose from his chair, and even while talking Avery brought the muzzle of the gun he held up onto the yellow-haired sailor's stomach again.

The native chief gave a guttural order and two of his men stepped forward and seized the girl, dragging her back and binding her arms behind her and her ankles together. She resisted furiously. Watkins then took her on deck.

"I was going to let Armod bring you back to Batavia after a month, Crewe," Avery said, "but, since I've got your daughter I'll have to get rid of you. You're liable to be vindictive. Sorry."

He waved his revolver round, bowed a little and with a cruel smile turned and went up the companion. Then John Armod went berserk again.

It took the four powerful natives seven minutes to get him bound and helpless, and in the process the saloon was well nigh demolished. At the last Armod lay huddled in a corner, thongs cutting into his flesh, panting and bruised, with his clothes ripped from his body. When he recovered his breath he called across to Crewe. The gray-haired man lifted his head and looked, dullness in his eyes and despair creasing his face.

"I believe you're white, Crewe, and I'll let bygones be bygones," Armod said. "I know now it was Avery I've wanted all along. I'm with you, man!"

"Thank you, Armod." Crewe nodded wearily. "I'm glad for that. But what's the use now?"

He looked at the four natives busily engaged over a gin bottle and some cups they had found in the little steward's pantry. It did seem hopeless. All the ship's crew were helpless or dead, and a horde of brown men were in control. But Armod's jaw was rigid and his eyes were steady and cool.

VIII

THE four natives left the saloon at last and Crewe, looking around, saw that it was dawn. Gray light filled the port-holes in the cabins and gray light filtered through the skylight overhead. Armod struggled to his feet with a mighty effort, bracing himself against the bulkhead, and hobbled across the deck to the chair next his fellow captive's. He had hardly flopped down when the *Lucy Carroll* checked in her sailing gait, slowed almost to a stop and was jarred by something scraping along her hull.

"That's the damned yacht," Armod grated.

Crewe nodded moodily.

"I'm thinking of my daughter," he said.

"So am I," Armod muttered.

Shoes clumped along the deck above. Once a white man shouted a command. The *Lucy Carroll* drifted with the light swell. Then the scraping along her hull increased. She heeled slightly to port, abruptly righted herself, and the scraping was gone. The native chief descended the companion steps. He spoke jerkily to Crewe.

Crewe turned to Armod.

"He wants to know if you'll navigate the ship for him," he explained. "I guess these Malays can't handle anything but praus and sampans."

Armod thought. If he refused it was likely he'd be tortured. If he consented he'd at least have a reasonable amount of freedom and might be able to plan something.

"Where's he want to go?" he asked Crewe. "Ask him what his plans are, if he'll tell."

Crewe talked rapidly for a few minutes. "He wants to make the coast of Borneo, at a place called Soekarina. I believe it's somewhere between Point Puting and Kota Waringin Bay. Sort of stockaded village. The man's quite frank about it. He's going to join his brother who's pirating these waters. The Malays will go with him. He says he's got no personal quarrel with us but he's given his word to Avery that he'll get us out of the way. Probably sell us to the interior tribes as slaves or grub."

"I'll navigate," said Armod. "Tell him to cut me loose."

The native shook his head and smiled. He was rather a pleasant looking man in spite of his wild adornments and the gold-hilted kris thrust in his silk sarong. He wouldn't let the captain go because the captain fought too much, but he'd untie the feet and retie the hands more loosely. Armod agreed because there was nothing else to do. The native called and two of his men appeared.

When Armod at last ascended the companion his hands were loosely but securely lashed behind him and his ankles were loosely but securely tied so that he could take short steps but was prevented from running or moving very fast. He breathed the morning air deeply and ran his gaze slowly over the sea.

Astern the sails of the yacht *Deodar* glowed like flecks of pearl against the blazing sky. The Java coast was out of sight. Far on the starboard beam a tiny island lifted fluffy palms and over them hung the minute speck that was a flock of some sort of birds. The water was ruffled by the fair wind, heavy with spices and land smells. The swell ran unhurried, half a mile between crests; tiny pink clouds blurred the sunrise.

Along the decks of the *Lucy Carroll* brown men sprawled and chewed betel nut, or cooked queer meals over little fires kindled on the deck without regard for the planking. Here and there were knots of figures bound hand and foot, piled one over the other in a careless way. Armod gritted his teeth. It was his fault his crew was drawn into this thing.

The native chief touched Crewe's arm and talked in the dialect. Crewe had been brought on the poop to interpret and was bound hand and foot as he had been in the saloon.

"Give your orders and they'll be obeyed," he said.

Armod turned and asked for his charts. He nodded away to starboard.

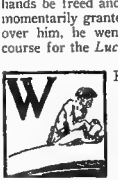
"What island is that?"

Crewe looked at it long and intently and then addressed a question to the native.

"I thought so," he said to Armod. "It's Boerang Island. Just a few bech-de-mer fishers live there."

"Get me my charts then and I'll set a course," Armod directed.

He shouted some orders about the sails and Crewe repeated them. Not a native stirred until the chief spoke three whip-like words. Then every man was on his feet and at work. Armod studied the charts brought to him, requested that his hands be freed and, when the request was momentarily granted, two natives standing over him, he went to work plotting the course for the *Lucy Carroll*.



WHEN that was over, a lookout stationed in the bows and some orders about washing down given, Armod's hands were retied and he hobbled aft with Crewe to instruct the helmsman. By the side of the saloon skylight Crewe stopped short and uttered a muffled exclamation. Armod stopped, too, but was silent. At full length on the deck lay two white men, lashed and helpless. One was a tubby, tanned man with a freckled face and dark eyes; the other was thin and of medium height, with reddish hair and a large Adam's apple.

"Hello, stranger. Who are you?" the freckle-faced man drawled, smiling.

"I'm Crewe of Batavia."

"George! I'd never have known you. Perspective's kind of out when you're squinting at a man upside down, so to speak. I'm Bruce Cunningham, planter at Sumba Island, or I was. Whose your friend?"

"Captain John Armod, owner of this ship."

"Whew! Was owner, you mean. Don't tell me those niggers tied him up out of friendship. How do, Cap. My pal's name is Morris, Sam Morris. He was a trader on Webba in the Kanglean Islands,

or was till he bucked Avery. Say, where are we all consigned for?"

With an effort the tubby man managed to sit up and prop his back against the combing of the skylight. His companion followed suit. Armod went on aft and talked to the helmsman, Crewe interpreting, and then the two of them came back.

"The natives are taking us to Soëkarina on the coast of Borneo," Crewe answered Bruce Cunningham's question. "From there only God knows where we'll land. Probably be sold into the interior. Has Avery some grudge against you two?"

The lean man with the Adam's apple spoke up.

"Avery had the full-rigger *City of Marseilles* sunk in Macassar Straits for the insurance," he explained. "Had the second mate put her on a reef where the Dyaks could loot her. They paid him a commission for that. I heard about it from a native who was at the looting and came to Batavia to talk to the Dutch. My brother was drowned on the ship."

"Avery runs the Dutch hereabouts and he got word," explained Cunningham cheerfully. "Wherefor Mr. Morris disappeared one dark night. I knew too much about some pearl poaching and was removed for the same reason. We both were collected on board Avery's yacht last night and jerked onto this packet."

Armod laughed with genuine amusement. They all looked at him.

"You've got to hand it to Avery," the yellow-haired sailor explained. "No wonder he's made his pile. I thought I could be ruthless, but I'm a baby at the game. This ship of mine is being used as a sort of clearing house for undesirables, eh?"

"That's it," said the tubby, tanned man.

"Maybe they'll find the burned hulk and our corpses later and it'll all be blamed on the pirate praus," observed the thin man pessimistically. "Oh, Avery's smart."

"I found that out years ago," Crewe muttered. "He'll stop at nothing to get what he wants." His face darkened at the thought of his daughter.

"Are these natives Avery's men?" Armod put in abruptly. "I mean, can they be bribed?"

Crewe shook his head.

"I don't expect so. He's blood-brother to half the native chiefs and knows too much about the rest for them to go back on him."

"He wouldn't leave us here if he wasn't sure of them," added the tubby man. "My stars, but it's gettting hot."

It was getting hot. The sun was well above the horizon now, a blazing ball of fire surrounded by molten mists of gold and mauve. They cleared gradually, allowing the full heat of the burning rays to strike the sea and the decks of the *Lucy Carroll*. Crewe spoke to the native chief and the two men sitting on the deck were dragged into the scant shadow of the sail. The crew of the *Lucy Carroll*, on the main deck, were dragged below, out of sight somewhere. Only Armod and Crewe remained in the sun, looking across the dazzling sea and trying to plan some way out of the mess.

There seemed no way out. There were at least a hundred natives on board, all well-tried ruffians from Avery's ships and plantations. They had taken many vessels away like this and were too wise to give their captives much freedom. What could a man do with his hands and feet tied, without weapons, weary with fighting and lack of sleep? The weariness passed, of course, but the helplessness remained.

Days slipped by. Sometimes a ship was sighted, but there was no means of giving a signal, and whenever a sail hove to view the Malays took the white men below out of sight. Once Armod saw Drummond on the main deck, but there was no chance to speak.

It seemed months before the barkentine slipped by Fox Banks and made a landfall of the Borneo Coast. Praus filled with armed men came out to them occasionally, but always returned when the natives on the ship shouted to them. Then Point Puting was sighted on the starboard bow and the *Lucy Carroll* went into a wide gut and approached Soekarina, anchoring just before the narrowing river grew too shallow to float her. Canoes shot from creeks hidden in the mangroves. Natives met and jabbered with the natives on the barkentine. There was much excitement, and great preparations for a feast were made.

The white men were apprehensive but no attempt was made to harm them. Curious men and women came to gaze and inspect, but then departed.

The prisoners were well fed and allowed to walk the decks for exercise. Crewe discovered the reason, after listening to a conversation in the barkentine's saloon between three chiefs.

"We're to be sold into the interior to some rajah, probably to show him how to drill his men or build boats," he explained to Armod. "Most of the native chiefs

have got the craze for improvements since Sir James Brooke took over Sarawak. Matter of pride to be Western, you know. The Dutch frown on it. Don't want the natives to know too much or they'll get out of hand."

Bruce Cunningham screwed up his plump face and chuckled.

"More likely we'll go into the stew-pot and our heads'll adorn the club-house. Hope not. I'd like t' spend a while as prime minister or chief of the Department of Roads."

"We might be able to make a getaway later so long as we're not to be killed," suggested Armod.

Crewe frowned.

"You're not consigned with us, Armod," he added. "You're expected to take this ship down the coast to Lauti Island, near the entrance to Macassar Straits, where there's some Chinese merchants will buy it."

"Risky for the Chinks," said Bruce Cunningham.

His companion, Sam Morris, swallowed hard and nodded. Crewe laughed shortly.

"Not so risky," he said. "The Chinks do this sort of thing all the time, buy up stolen ships and junks. They alter them and change the name and run them across to China and resell them to some unscrupulous European company. I lost a schooner myself that way once."

"Then," said Armod curtly, "it means we'll have to make a getaway before you start inland. When am I supposed to start navigating, did you find out?"

Crewe shook his head hopelessly.

"I'll ask a few questions here and there; but just as soon as this feast is over there's no telling when matters will move."

Sam Morris swallowed hard again. When his Adam's apple was stilled once more he ventured a suggestion.

"We can get loose all right. We can stand back to back and unlash each other's arms. That is, if we could get away from the guards. But what would we do after we got loose? We can't take this ship to sea. We can't swim anywhere; they'd find us ashore. The only way left is to lower a longboat and beat it. I move we try it when the feasting's on."

"No other way and no other chance," said Crewe curtly.

Armod nodded. Bruce Cunningham nodded. He was game for anything. Also he was, inside him, a little dubious. So many other men had been taken away by Avery's natives and it was certain that escape must have been tried. Yet none had ever returned to Batavia to expose the merchant.

DUSK was falling by the time the four white men had decided on their next move. All day natives had been ransacking the ship, tearing off doorknobs, lowering new ropes and kegs of lead and nails overside. The lazarette midships had been stripped of food, but so far the little store-hold under the deck of the saloon had not been located. It was in the store-hold that the ship's liquor was kept. The native chief who had brought the white men into the river had asked Armod once if there were any spirits on board. On being told there were not, he had confiscated to his own use what few bottles were in the saloon and cabin lockers and appeared to be satisfied.

Armod's intention was to stop the natives getting drunk, as in such a condition there was no telling what might happen to their captives. Now he was beginning to see that the liquor might help them all to escape. He told his idea to Crewe, who agreed but was doubtful that it could be managed.

The stars winked out one by one and along the river bank, among the mangroves where the native villages grouped, the cooking fires glowed redly. The *Lucy Carroll* was almost deserted, except for some two dozen natives left aboard to guard the prisoners. The four white men on the poop were taken below and locked in the saloon, while several Malays sprawled on the poop itself, near the skylight, and chewed betel-nut and talked in low voices. The barkentine's crew was locked in the fo'c's'le and other natives sprawled on the deck outside the scuttle.

Perhaps an hour after they had been shut in Armod leaned through the darkness toward Crewe, who sat huddled in a chair.

"Ready," he asked in a low voice.

Crew raised his head and nodded. Armod touched with his foot the two other men lying on the deck near him. They sat up with some effort, groaning at stiff legs in which the lashing had nearly stopped the circulation.

Armod and Crewe stood up, back to back, so that Crewe's fingers could fumble with the lashings that bound Armod's arms. It was nearly two hours before

Crewe succeeded in freeing his companion. After that everything was comparatively simple. Armod released the others.

"It all depends," he whispered, "on whether they've left the medicine chest or not."

He started for his cabin. His eyes were used to the darkness and he had no difficulty in seeing the confusion that lay within. The straw bunk mattress was torn and half folded in the middle of the deck. The red carpet had been ripped up and was gone. Splintered bulkheads, torn white towels, half of a pajama jacket, some papers and spilled ink testified that the natives had looted everything of value. The flat tin medicine chest itself was gone, but here and there, among the papers and fragments of cloth, were vials and little bottles, some smashed to attoms, some cracked, a few unbroken.

All four men went on their knees and searched, gathering the vials and bottles in a little heap near the door. It was Sam Morris who made the big find, two undamaged bottles of laudanum in a corner under a ripped log book. Armod almost laughed aloud. He made a quick survey of all that had been collected, picked up two other bottles and a small vial and then led the way into the saloon again.

The saloon was not very much damaged by the looting natives, perhaps because there was little in it except the table and swivel chairs and carpet. The lamps were gone and the gimbals had been wrenched from the deck head. The carpet was slit but had not been removed, due perhaps to the fact the table and chairs would have had to be unscrewed or demolished before it could have been torn clear.

Armod flung back the carpet near the after bulkhead and exposed a trap-door set flush with the deck, an iron ring serving as a lifting handle. It was unlocked and swung upward easily when Bruce Cunningham pulled. It was pitch dark below but Armod went confidently down the broad steps. Who should know a ship if not her master?

After a while, out of the black pit below, a squat, neat keg made its appearance, propelled upward by unseen hands. Two of those above grasped it and lifted it clear to the saloon deck. Two other kegs followed and then a case, wire-bound and sturdy looking. After that Armod reappeared and gently lowered the trap-door and replaced the carpet.

"My own private lazarette," he grinned. "Now we'll get busy."

They all worked in silence, broken only by the murmur of the natives talking on the poop above and the gentle tap-tapping as a bung was removed or replaced. Several times Armod stood up and shook heavy kegs as though he were making a cocktail. Indeed it was a serious business preparing liquor that would send strong-headed Dyaks and Malays and Javanese to sleep in short order.

When it was all ready and the night well advanced Armod bound Crewe again and then bound Cunningham and Morris. It was quite a job to bind himself but, with the aid of Crewe, he got his bonds into something like condition; enough to pass in the darkness. Crewe went noisily up the companion to the poop and kicked at the shut slide. After a while a native called out sharply and Crewe answered.

Thereafter there was a long conversation between the gray-headed trader and the excited Malays on deck. The slide was shot back, letting in hot night air and a hint of the stars. The natives from midships came aft and gathered in a jabbering body round the helpless Crewe, whom they had hauled in their midst. Below the three other men waited and remained quiet, Armod and Cunningham pretending to sleep on the carpet over the trap-door. Morris huddled in a chair.

The natives came pouring down to the saloon, thrusting Crewe before them. He tapped the deck with his foot above the trap door, and Armod and Cunningham were unceremoniously thrust aside and the carpet ripped up. Four natives went into the inky blackness of the interior and presently again three kegs and a wire-bound case appeared. There was much jabbering, and cases of canned goods, a few trunks of clothes and some rifles, greased and wrapped in canvas, were passed up also. Then, the little lazarette being exhausted, all went on deck, slamming the scuttle shut on the white men again.

IX

ARMOD rose awkwardly to his feet and placed his back against Cunningham's to have his loose bonds unfastened.

"Well, let's get ready now," he said quietly.

"I told 'em as there was a feast in progress they should have some liquor," Crewe explained what had taken place. "They asked me if I knew where there was any as they'd searched the

ship pretty thoroughly and found none. I told them I'd thought of that and concluded they might have overlooked the captain's private lazarette down here. They argued a bit amongst themselves first whether they should send ashore for one of the chiefs or not. Finally they decided to get the stuff, hide part of it for themselves and send the rest ashore to the feasters. That's all."

"Good enough," said Armod. "Now we'll give them an hour or so and then we'll make a move."

When all the men were free once more they set about quietly providing themselves with weapons. Armod secured a length of iron bar that had been used to brace one of the legs of the saloon table. Cunningham found the leg of a broken chair and the others broke off flimsy clubs from the sides of bunks, making a noise that the others partly drowned by coughing and talking aloud. But the natives seemed indifferent. Time ticked by. Armod wondered what had happened to the men told off to guard the saloon as he could no longer hear any conversation in progress near the skylight. Once he thought he caught from midships the murmur of a low-voiced sort of chant, but he was not sure.

They waited an hour, smoking and sometimes talking in low tones. Then at last Armod muttered an order and they grouped together in the center of the saloon. Armod and Cunningham climbed on the table and lifted up Morris, who was the lightest of the party, until he could reach the skylights. Morris pushed one of these up cautiously and peered over the combing onto the starlit poop. He saw nothing and quietly pushed back the skylight until it remained up of its own accord.

Then he hoisted himself onto the poop. Still no one came within his vision. He circled the poop and found it deserted. Peering for'ard he thought he could discern a huddled group of figures near the galley house but was not sure. If they were natives they were asleep or else had succumbed to the drugged liquor. He returned to the skylight and whispered to those below.

Cunningham came up next, then Crewe. Finally all hands bent over to lend Armod a hand and the yellow-haired sailor gained the deck after a struggle. He stood up at last and followed Morris to the break of the poop to peer for'ard at the shapeless huddle by the galley house. Silently he slipped down the companion and, keeping in the shadows, went to inspect. It seemed to the others he was gone a long time but it could not have been more than five minutes altogether.

At last he appeared at the foot of the companion.

"They're all asleep," he called up softly. "Been drinking from one of the kegs. Come on down."

They all went onto the main deck and started to take the lashings off the biggest whaleboat.

"Not much sound from ashore," Armod muttered. "They must all have been drinking."

Crewe nodded.

"Worn out with eating and dancing, most likely," he agreed. "The drink would help, too."

Morris and Cunningham went to procure water and food while Armod and Crewe lowered the boat. In less than half an hour all was ready. Morris and Cunningham dropped down to the whaleboat's bows and Crewe prepared to follow.

"Make straight out to sea," Armod called, leaning over the barkentine's side. "Don't chance the coast because of the proas and junks. This time of the year you should be able to run clear to Batavia in a small boat, providing the water lasts."

"Aren't you coming along?" Crewe uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"There's my crew," Armod explained. "I can't leave them. You go ahead and make Batavia and see that Vera—Miss Crewe is all right. I'll free my men and we'll work this ship out of the river somehow."

Bruce Cunningham in the boat below swore softly and started to climb up to the barkentine's main deck again.

"If you stay, so do I," he said.

"Hell!" Sam Morris growled, but he started to climb back, too.

"Get away, you fools," Armod ordered. "This's my ship and I'll stay. You've got to get clear for Miss Crewe's sake."

"But we can't let you stand the gaff, Armod," Crewe protested, nervous and shaking. "Come along. We'll have a gunboat sent in to get your men."

Armod shrugged.

"A captain should be as loyal to his men as his men are to him—and mine have stuck in some tight places," he said. "If you won't go, wait a bit and we'll make some different arrangements. Is there another boat left aboard?"

"One lashed on top of the galley house, I think," said Cunningham.

Armod made no reply but went for'ard along the deck, past the huddled group of natives and to the fo'c's'le. He found the scuttle barred and wedged shut and it took him nearly ten minutes to open it. Below all was pitch dark and he fell over a man before he had taken ten paces.

"Who's this?" he muttered, stooping over the form.

"Johnson. That you, sir?" The seaman was relieved and his voice betrayed the fact.

"Where's Drummond, Mr. Drummond?"

"Somewhere among us, sir," said the seaman.

"Over here, sir," Drummond spoke for himself. "By the second bunk on the starboard side."

"Wait a bit." Armod rapidly released the seaman Johnson and set him to work to free his comrades. Then he crossed over and groped about until he found Drummond sitting against a stanchion and swearing to himself.

"Haven't had a chew for days," the old sailor was complaining.

Armod chuckled as he fumbled with thick knots. He explained in terse sentences how he had gained his freedom and then it was Drummond's turn to chuckle.

When every one was on his feet and busily massaging cramped legs and numb wrists, Armod led them to the main deck and found that Crewe and the other two had unlashed the whaleboat from the top of the galley house and were busily trying to haul it to the side. Armod spent a few minutes tying up the inert native guards and packing them into the galley itself. Then he assisted with the boat. It was lowered, provisioned with what the looters had dropped and left aboard, and had its crew in less than an hour—all with a minimum of noise. Not that Armod thought interference likely, but he believed caution was best. There might be some natives ashore who had not drunk or who might be recovering from the effects of their debauch.

FF at last, the two boats were rowed silently past the *Lucy Carroll*, beyond the dark loom of her hull and out onto the broad sweep of the shallow river. The current aided them and rapidly the barkentine merged and disappeared into the darkness and starlight. Armod was not greatly worried about his ship. The low tide and danger of navigating an unfamiliar river made an attempt to escape in the vessel extremely unwise—aside from the noise getting under way was sure to make. Once he could get word to his consul at any port where there was a cable, a wicked, dull-gray gunboat would go poking up to Soekarina and destruction would be visited on the rajah. Also the barkentine *Lucy Carroll* would be brought to a civilized port with a prize crew and handed over to her rightful owner.

The main object for the present was to get clear of the river and back to Batavia to see what had become of Vera Crewe and to turn the tables on Walter Avery. So Armod hoisted sail and kept his men at the oars. Long before dawn the whaleboats were level with Point Puting and heading out into the Java Sea. So far they had not sighted a solitary sail. With sun-up, still rowing and sailing, they had put the Borneo coast astern and were losing themselves from pursuit in the trackless blue of the open water. Certain it was the Malays and Dyaks would follow as soon as they discovered their captives missing. Avery's wrath would be terrible when he heard and not only would the natives lose what future business the Batavia merchant might have given them but it was also likely that Avery, with his vast influence, would have them hunted as common pirates from every village and harbor in the South.

The sea was calm and the wind remained steady and fair out of the northeast for two days so that the whaleboats made good progress and were not separated. Armod was in the boat with Drummond and a good half of his crew. The rest occupied the other craft. Both had orders to make for Batavia, unless a ship was sighted before, when they were to endeavor to get picked up. In case of water running out they were to make for Kebatos Island or any other speck of land that boasted fresh water springs.

In the main, however, all realized they were bent on a desperate venture. Even if they escaped thirst and hunger for a time they might run into weather that would sink them. They might meet pirate craft, junks or proas or even one of Avery's own schooners, the captain of which would know what to do with them. It was a long, long voyage to Batavia from Borneo in open boats.

Luck, however, helped them. Armod

would have said it was the little joss of Chance working again. On the fourth day out from Soekarina the canvas of a three-masted schooner lifted above the sea-rim and a lean, dark hull came foaming toward them.

"That's the *Foster Clark*—my own schooner," Crewe, standing by the mast of his boat and shading his eyes under his hand, shouted at last. "I'd know that patch on her mains'l anywhere. Signal, Armod!"

Every man in both boats was on his feet, waving and shouting, threatening to swamp their craft. As the schooner foamed nearer a stocky, bearded man on her poop could be seen watching the castaways through a spy-glass. Then he removed the glass to bawl orders for a moment and the schooner came round a trifle and slid to scarce half a cable's length from the whaleboats. Oars dug deep; the sails were hauled down, and the castaways came alongside where a Kanaka seaman was lowering a short, wooden-runged rope ladder.

The bearded man was leaning over the schooner's poop rail.

"Who're you?" he shouted. "How long you been adrift?"

"Hello, Matthews," called Crewe with a laugh, dabbing tenderly at his sun-scorched neck and face.

The master of the *Foster Clark* opened his mouth and his eyes bulged. He certainly hadn't expected to see his employer adrift in the middle of the Java Sea.

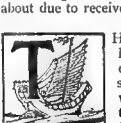
"I'll be damned—Mr. Crewe!" he managed to croak at last. "Have you lost the yacht—the *Nautilus*? What're you doing adrift?"

"A little patience, Matthews, and you'll hear. Can you fix up these men with mattresses and water and food—principally water, I think, as we've been on short rations."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir," the astounded Captain Matthews hastily agreed.

He bellowed hoarsely at his Kanakas, at his Chinese cook, at his steward and his white mate and half-caste supercargo. In two minutes the *Foster Clark* was in uproar, being turned inside out to provide comforts and service for the castaways. Crewe brought Armod, Drummond, Cunningham and Morris aft with him and Captain Matthews watched them all eat and drink vast quantities at the table of his saloon.

After they had finished, and not until they had finished, Captain Matthews heard as much of the story as his employer saw fit to tell him. The captain was one month out of Singapore and was now bound on his bi-yearly visiting of several of Crewe's plantations to pick up cargoes and carry them back to Batavia for disposal, leaving in their place food and implements, weapons and trade goods. Crewe ordered him to make a course for Batavia. The captain shrugged and went on deck to speak to the helmsman. It was none of his business if his employer wanted to disrupt the whole schedule. Anyway Walter Avery did need a trimming and it looked as though he was about due to receive it.



THE men left in the saloon were just considering turning in for some much needed sleep when Captain Matthews bawled for them from the upper deck. Armod, who was smearing ointment over some of the worst of Crewe's sun-blisters, dropped the little jar he held and went up the companion to the poop three steps at a time.

"You said Malays and Dyaks," grunted Captain Matthews, clawing at his beard and nodding away to the northern horizon. "Well, here they are."

Armod shielded his eyes and stared. It was as he had feared, as he had been fearing all during the voyage in the whaleboats. The native proas were in pursuit. He could see three of the smaller craft and one unwieldy looking but unbelievably fast-sailing junk lifting over the sea rim. Crewe joined Armod, and Morris and Cunningham were not far behind. In the schooner's waist the Kanaka crew and the white men from the abandoned *Lucy Carroll* lined the rail and stared and jabbered among themselves.

Drummond lumbered on deck last of all and spat amber juice overside.

"Another fight. We'd better be arming," he remarked, squinting at the racing proas.

Armod nodded grimly and turned to Captain Matthews.

"Can we outsail them?"

"Maybe. I've a slow packet here," the captain replied dubiously. "Some of them native craft can clip off a few knots, y' know."

"Better get your guns up and serve them out," commented Crewe, impatiently.

He was worrying about his daughter.

still and this new complication threatened to hold him back from her.

Captain Matthews clawed at his beard again and frowned darkly.

"I've only half a dozen Winchesters and maybe a dozen revolvers."

"Dynamite?" questioned Armod.

"Coupla cases, I guess."

"That'll do. Get it all on deck and we'll see first how we stand for sailing away from them."

The wind had fallen considerably since the castaways had come aboard and in the lighter air the proas and the junk made better time than the somewhat unwieldy *Foster Clark*. Not very much better, though, for all during the hot afternoon the following craft did not gain more than two miles.

"How'd they know we're aboard?" Drummond said, once, reflectively.

"They figure that if they don't find us their goose is cooked with Avery," Crewe, who really had quite a surprising knowledge about natives and their thought processes, suggested. "It's likely they'll loot the first ship they can lay aboard, make some sort of a clean-up. Then they'll load up the *Lucy Carroll*, and sail away to some other part of the coast where the Dutch law doesn't run."

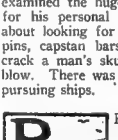
"That'd be it," grunted Captain Matthews. Then cautiously he added, "Most likely."

Armod in the meantime passed among his crew and saw to it that the best shots had the rifles and the others what few revolvers were aboard. He had broken open the cases of dynamite and, binding the sticks together in twos, had fastened to each small bundle thus made a detonating cap and a short fuse, split at the end to hold the head of a match. These somewhat crude bombs were terribly effective at close quarters and were often used through the South in the brief but bloody battles that cropped up at irregular intervals between the white men and the natives.

As nightfall drew near Captain Matthews grew optimistic. There would be several hours of almost pitch darkness, before the moon rose, and the *Foster Clark* would be able to change her course and perhaps get clear away. But he reckoned without the wind. As the last of the sun plunged into the sea the moving air faltered, blew a few hot gusts and then died altogether. The proas and the junk were likewise becalmed in a group about seven miles away.

"Nothing for it but fight now," said Armod. "When they find we're aboard they'll make the fight a hot one. If they can only kill us they'll be satisfied. That'd suit Avery. We'd better find some weapons for hand to hand fighting in case it comes to that."

Captain Matthews grunted approval and examined the huge revolver he had kept for his personal use. The others went about looking for suitable clubs, belaying pins, capstan bars, anything that would crack a man's skull or ward off a knife blow. There was no hesitation about the pursuing ships.



PROPELLED by long sweeps, they came on slowly, three proas and the junk, a high-pooped, high-fo'c's'le-headed affair. In the very last of the swift fading light Armod saw that on the junk's poop was the native chief with the gold-hilted kris who had had charge of the captives and had persuaded Armod to navigate the *Lucy Carroll* to Borneo.

Almost at the moment Armod recognized him the chief recognized Armod. He raised one bare brown arm and screamed out half a dozen words that seemed to awake his followers to frenzy. They ceased rowing for a moment, leaped up and waved weapons and yelled, too.

"He said he knew you, Armod, and that you'd never have a chance to get away this time," Crewe explained. "He'd have your head for his house before the sun rose."

"I see," said Armod and he smiled, though his eyes were cold and his lips were a thin line across his face.

The proas and the junk came on, parted company astern of the schooner and, as the pitch blackness of night fell, surged up alongside the becalmed ship. Pale rifle flames ran along the schooner's rail. One or two knives sped like silver snakes. Then from both sides the *Foster Clark* was boarded.

There was a monstrous crash as twin dynamite sticks landed on the fo'c's'le of the junk and blew a raving group of Dyaks right and left like straws. Another crash as dynamite exploded in the teeming junk's waist. The combined crews of the *Foster Clark* and the abandoned *Lucy Carroll* were in a desperate clump by the schooner's mainmast, shooting hard and dropping men all about them. Captain Matthews went down from the poop and fought a way to his Kanakas. Crewe, Cunningham,

Morris and Drummond fell on the attackers' rear with belaying pins and capstan bars. Soon they had procured better weapons from fallen foes and were doing deadly execution. Armod held the poop alone, smoking a cigar and lighting off dynamite by touching the match-head in the split fuses to the glowing end of the tobacco.

In the darkness it was hard to distinguish friend and foe and this fact hindered rather than helped the attacking natives. They cut down several of their own men and those with guns shot wildly at anything that moved before them. Only the flashes from exploding dynamite gave brief glimpses of affairs. The defenders were taking terrible toll. Even so, they would have been overborne by sheer force of numbers but for the wind. Again as abruptly as it had deserted the schooner and left her open to attack, it sprang up again, first gustily, and then in steady even strength, clear out of the north, sending the schooner drifting and causing her to roll from side to side.

The junk and the proas had not been made fast to the *Foster Clark* but merely had been kept alongside by odd men at the sweeps. Now the schooner, with her canvas still up, began to draw away. The attacking craft had furled their sails before rowing and there were not enough men at the sweeps to keep pace with the schooner.

Armod noticed what was happening, his eyes more accustomed to the dark with every passing minute, and in rapid succession he hurled dynamite at each of the proas, the junk having sagged too far astern for him to reach. Then he ran down from the poop and plunged into the melee on the main deck, spotting some of his own crew and dragging them away from their opponents. He barked orders in their ears, shook them to rid them of the fighting lust, and raced back to the wheel.

There was a slatting of canvas. Booms creaked and swung. Ropes slackened and then drew tight. Armod was hauling the wheel round with all the strength of his powerful arms. Filled with sudden dismay, the attackers looked about to find themselves on a schooner running gracefully before the wind with their own craft wallowing in the long swell astern.

It was the end so far as fighting was concerned. The defenders fought with redoubled fury. In the breathing space which followed guns were loaded. The Malays and Dyaks broke and fled, jumping over the rail and swimming madly back for the proas. In fifteen minutes the decks were deserted by all save the dead and badly wounded and the jubilant defenders. Armod held the wheel and laughed deep in his throat. He had a sense he had been through all this before, in the long ago; a main deck slippery and red, bodies in the scuppers, the wind on his neck and the lunge of a ship under his feet; above all the fighting lust that tingled through him. He laughed again into the night.

Presently Crewe came on the poop, weary and blood streaked and worried as always about his daughter.

"That was lucky, Armod. Wind came just in time. You think quick, thank God. Perhaps we can make Batavia now. I wonder if they sent a proa ahead to warn Avery."

"Luck's falling our way now, Crewe," Armod said, happily. "All Avery's gang couldn't keep me from Miss Crewe now. I feel it in me. I'm going to kill him slowly with my hands alone."

"Ah," sighed the gray-headed man.

"That Morris man's dead and I saw Cunningham go overside with a coupla niggers wrapped round him," Drummond reported as he came on the poop.

"They died like gentlemen and brothers," responded Armod gravely. "I'm sorry; I liked them both. But a man is lucky to go out fighting. They make two more counts on the score Avery must settle. Where's Captain Matthews?"

"Here," boomed a voice and the captain stalked from the shadows by the main mast and climbed the companion. He was dirty and sweat-stained and his clothes were in ribbons. The back of his right hand was pitted with powder marks—the back-spit of his gun—and he looked contented. He had slain three Malays by his own count and fired indiscriminately into groups with the almost certain possibility of injuring many more.

"Teach them damned swine t' interfere with a mariner on the high seas," he grumbled. "Are you hurt, Mr. Crewe?"

"Just bruises and a few cuts. We must thank Armod for getting us away."

"Aye, that was seamanship. I thought to bring the schooner about but I had my hands full. I say we ought to drink."

"First decent remark I've heard lately," muttered Drummond, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Matthews strode to the break of the poop and barked out a command. Immediately a grinning, sweating Samoan came up the companion and took the wheel. Then

all the white men went below, leaving those on deck to clean up and keep watch that the proas did not follow and draw in too close.

It was evident that the coast men had had enough, however, for when the moon rose there was no sign of either proas or the junk, not even the glimmer of a sail-edge above the horizon. Armod worked out his position, compared it with Captain Matthews's figures and together they set the course again for Batavia. After that came washing and then sleep. Captain Matthews and his Kanakas had the ship to themselves for the rest of the night.

X

THE *Foster Clark* ran without further hindrance down to the Boompjez Islands and started west to run along the Java coast before turning in for Batavia. Twice they sighted trading schooners and once a long, lean craft that might or might not have been a government ship, though she flew no flag. But they were not hailed and drew near their port with jubilation on the part of Captain Matthews but with frowning uneasiness on the part of both Crewe and Drummond.

"It's like this," Crewe said. "The first thing the Malays would do would be to send a ship to Avery with the news we'd got away. They'd do that anyway because Avery pays well for vital information even if it is not the sort he wants to hear. We were four days in the whaleboats, making slow time, and a big sailing vessel, a prau for instance, would be well on her way to Batavia long before Matthews picked us up. It's almost a certainty Avery knows we're free and he must be keeping a watch. I don't understand why it is he hasn't made an attempt to stop us."

Armod laughed. He was not so optimistic as Captain Matthews nor so apprehensive as Crewe and Drummond.

"What if he hasn't?" he said. "He doesn't know we're on the *Foster Clark*. He can't have word of that yet. He'll be watching the ships that make for Batavia and perhaps have his agents on the look-out at all the island ports. Once he locates us you'll find things happening. My advice is to wait until trouble starts again and then we'll worry. The main thing is to get word to someone you can trust—I imagine the British consul is above reproach—and have Miss Crewe set free. After that we can deal with Avery. As a matter of fact it seems to me that once we get in touch with the consul our friend will be pretty well powerless."

"Avery has tremendous resources," muttered Crewe, shaking his head. "I have myself, but unless I can get ashore and talk with my managers they might as well not exist."

"We'll get you ashore," Armod promised. "I'm as much interested in the matter as you are, more so perhaps."

So far Armod was right. The *Foster Clark* slipped into Batavia early one evening as the sun was westering. The port authorities came on board and found Captain Matthews standing with his mate and supercargo ready to receive them. The captain handed over his papers and entered into a lengthy explanation to the effect that he had been blown out of his course and had put into Batavia principally for water and fresh vegetables.

At first the officials were a little suspicious, for Batavia was hardly on the route from Singapore that the *Foster Clark* was supposed to take before making the Javanese port. But they appeared satisfied and went away at last. Armod, Crewe, Drummond, and the rest of the crew of the *Lucy Carroll*, who had been concealed below, remained out of sight until it was dark. Then the officers came on the poop to plan the next step.

"Mr. Crewe and I will go ashore and see if we can get in touch with the consul," said Armod. "You, Drummond and Matthews, take a boat and snoop about off Avery's place and see if you can spot anything. That all right, Crewe?"

Crewe nodded wearily.

"You handle everything. I'm worried about Vera. I think I'm getting old." He ran one hand across his tired eyes.

So two boats were dropped from the anchored schooner and in one Armod and Crewe pulled ashore. In the other Captain Matthews and Drummond pulled across the harbor to where, back from the shore, outside the city, Avery's great white home nestled among palms and a riot of carefully kept vegetation. They noticed that the steam yacht, the *Deodar*, was lying at anchor off the house, apparently with steam up, for a white feather was trickling from her stack.

Armod and Crewe tied up their boat in the shadows of a little used wharf and started uptown for the consular office. It was then that Armod realized he had made a mistake. He should have sent Captain

Matthews to the consul and induced that official to come aboard the schooner. They had to pass through several busy and well-lighted streets and the chance of being recognized was almost certain. Armod was all for turning back and getting Matthews, but Crewe, in his anxiety over his daughter, insisted that they keep on.

Much against his better judgment Armod continued on his way, keeping as much as possible to the darker alleys and walking with head bent. But he could never conceal his mighty shoulders and his yellow hair. Nor could such a well-known man as Crewe remain for long unrecognized. He was hailed by two acquaintances in the first hundred yards and they turned and stared after him in astonishment when he failed to answer.

A Javanese coolie brought the news hot-foot to Martin Conway. Avery's confidential man, and Martin Conway sent a message by runner to his employer in the white house beyond the city. Without waiting for an answer he called certain men to him and gave his instructions.

LONG before the two men from the sea had reached the consular office, forces were in motion against them. Once they had the consul's ear nothing save the consul's death could stop the ruin of Walter Avery and a scandal that would rock the administration of the Dutch East Indies. At the consulate a native servant opened the door and ushered them into a cool reception room and went away on silent feet to find his master or a secretary.

Crewe mopped his forehead and felt relieved. He felt the worst was over. It was certain that since his absence Avery had hammered his stocks on the market, practically ruined him perhaps, smashing his every activity, but nothing counted now except the safety of his daughter.

The servant returned, smiling and suave. The consul was at dinner with friends in another part of the city. No, there was no secretary within reach. Was there any message or would the *tuans* call again? Armod cursed under his breath and stared with hot eyes at the carpet. He sensed Avery's hand here. For an instant he had an idea to forcibly search the consulate. He suspected for a moment that the native was corrupt, and with Crew's aid, he questioned the man minutely.

He obtained a little further information. The consul had gone away in a carriage not ten minutes before, and the secretary had been taken abruptly sick and could see no one.

"They got the news damned quick," Armod said, with a curse. "We should have sent Matthews."

Crewe's head sagged and his eyes were despairing. It seemed everything was against them once more. They were in the very stronghold of the enemy. There was a chance that, if he, Crew, could get in touch with some of his managers and agents, he could bring pressure enough to bear for a showdown. But it would be hard to find them this late in the day. Some would have driven out in the cool of the night; some would be visiting. He suggested they search, but Armod vetoed that.

"We'll get Miss Crewe ourselves and then send Matthews after the consul," he decided. "He can't refuse to see a shipmaster who wants to report himself."

They left the consulate building and started back for the wharf where they had left their boat. Just as they left the busy business district and were approaching the waterfront the attack came.

Two dark-skinned men leaped from the shadows of a tall godown to their left. Three others came running from behind and still others rose before the two white men and closed in. Armod gave a short, hoarse roar and tugged at the revolver he carried in his side-pocket. Before he could free it he was submerged and a knife grazed his arm. He heard Crewe cry out with sudden pain and saw, vaguely, that the gray-headed trader was down. He went berserk then and for a while there was chaos.

It ended three minutes later when Armod broke through, carrying Crewe over one shoulder and using the butt of his revolver with his free hand. Two natives were inert on the ground; three others nursed bruises and broken bones; the remainder followed after the yellow-haired sailor, but with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm.

Armod reached the wharf-end and dropped down to the boat. He ripped the painter free and sent the craft out into the harbor with a vigorous thrust of one hand against the wharf piles. A few strokes and he was out of reach of the natives, who were gathered in a sullen, cursing knot on the wharf.

Well out in the harbor Armod turned to

Crewe whom he had flung down roughly in the stern sheets. The gray-haired man was badly hurt, a knife wound oozing blood from above his right breast and a long cut gashing him down the right cheek clear to the collar-bone. Armod himself was slightly wounded in the thigh and had several minor cuts about the body. There was also a huge bump swelling over his left temple where his head had collided with another man's in the melee.

He staunched Crewe's wounds as best he could and used his own shirt to bind them up temporarily. Then he made for the *Foster Clark*, and some of the seamen on board aided him in getting Crewe to his bunk and redressing his hurts. Captain Matthews and Drummond had not yet returned.

Armod went to his cabin and changed into a suit of the captain's serges, the clothes fitting him a trifle tightly and the trousers legs being much too short. He had about completed that operation and taken a stiff drink when a boat bumped alongside and Captain Matthews and Drummond appeared.

"Been in a fight, sir?" Drummond asked, with some astonishment, running his eyes over the visible traces of the conflict in the streets of Batavia.

"Did you see the consul?" asked Captain Matthews, equally astonished.

Armod shook his head and explained what had happened.

"I think the consul's all right," he concluded. "Avery just managed to get him out of the way for a while and perhaps had the secretary removed or poisoned. I want you to go ashore, Captain, and hunt up a doctor. Send him here to look at Mr. Crewe. Then stay in town until you find the consul and explain everything to him. Get him first of all to demand a search of Avery's house. Drummond and I will try to get in ourselves in the meantime. What did you find?"

"Natives guarding the grounds," said Drummond curtly. "An' a pretty smart watch bein' kept on that yacht. Looks t' me as though this Avery's expecting us to make a break his way. We tried t' land but were afraid we'd be spotted."

"I see," Armod nodded. "Well, get into some dark-colored clothes, Drummond. Lend him any other serges you've got, Captain. We'll get right away."

"I'd better go ashore armed, eh?" asked Captain Matthews.

Armod laughed.

"I'd advise it. Take a couple of Kanakas with you. But I hardly think you'll be bothered. Avery'll only be able to keep the consul occupied for so long, perhaps for tonight, and he'll likely figure to have us out of the way by morning. You won't be able to get in touch at the consulate before dawn and by that time you could do no harm. Still, it might be they'll try to eliminate every possibility of talk."

"Why wouldn't they?" demanded Drummond. "If they let anyone of this packet go there'd be talk."

"Sure. But who'd believe any native or white man if they told a story about three or four of us disappearing? And who'd believe Avery was to blame—or, rather, who could prove it? I tell you the more I get into this affair the more I believe that Walter Avery runs the Dutch East Indies. If I'm right, he controls the courts and the officials. We've got to either bluff the British consul into taking action, which I doubt possible, or, better yet, produce proof, in the shape of Miss Crewe, that something really fishy has been going on. If you, Matthews, can get the consul to come aboard and see Mr. Crewe, things might happen. Crewe's too big a man for the consul to doubt."

Drummond shrugged.

"Don't follow yer quite, sir, but you're skipper," he agreed. "When do we start?"

"Right away, soon as you get out of those white pants and the singlet."

Drummond went away to change and Armod spent many minutes explaining to Captain Matthews just what he should say to convince the consul that something was wrong. Consuls don't believe any wild tale they hear, and they daren't risk international complications by any hasty action. If Vera Crewe could be produced and her story heard, abduction at least could be charged against Avery, followed by a possible charge of piracy on the high seas, founded on the testimony to be given by the crew of the *Lucy Carroll* and the Kanakas of the *Foster Clark*.

ARMOD and Drummond left the schooner in the boat and rowed slowly across the harbor to the shore near Avery's house. It was a tall, two-storied structure with deep verandas and many wings. The grounds were perhaps five acres in extent and were dense with shrubbery, elms, and tiny artificial lakes and fountains. The whole right side of

the house was brilliantly lighted and occasionally, as mysterious as night moths winging through the darkness, figures of watchful natives could be seen passing before the lighted doorways and tall open windows.

About two cable's lengths from the shore Armod ceased rowing and peered through the starlight to where the *Deodar* lay at anchor, steam up and a light in her chart-room. That she was ready for sea there was no doubt. Armod decided it was probably that Avery felt impending downfall and was making ready his avenues of escape. It was reasonable to suppose he had transported all his valuables and belonging to the yacht at least until the present crisis passed.

The low lying whaleboat was not sighted from the *Deodar* and Armod, after some hesitation and whispered conferences with Drummond, stripped off his clothes and went overside, followed by his mate, both men wearing only blue serge pants rolled up above the knees. They swam quietly and without haste for the shore, their revolvers tied to the tops of their head with their handkerchiefs. Unobserved, they reached the mudlike sand and crawled up to the first of the shrubbery. Breathlessly they crouched against the bole of a palm while a lean Malay padded by, his restless eyes searching the beach and his hand on the hilt of a long curved knife.

When he had gone, the two white men wormed on through the grounds of the house, stopping every so often as a guard passed or repassed them. There must have been nearly a dozen men prowling round Avery's house that night. It was a sign he was nervous and apprehensive. That Armod and Drummond were not discovered they owed first to the fact the cover was good, and second to the fact that the natives expected any intruders to approach not from the harbor but from the landward side of the house.

The men reached a tiny knoll at last, densely covered with bushes and tall grass. At the foot of the knoll nestled a tiny, man-made lake in which queer yellow fish swam and sometimes leaped at an unwary insect skimming the surface above. From the knoll's crest, parting the bushes, Armod could see into the great main room of the house.

A broad punkah creaked and swung over a low, broad couch and on the couch sprawled Walter Avery. He had one arm flung negligently over a silk cushion and the other rested on the couch back and supported his head. He was smiling thinly and holding a long black cheroot between his lax teeth. He was in immaculate whites with a broad sash of blue silk.

Armod's eyes narrowed at the sight and there came back to him with full force the memory of a night years ago when old John Armod faced his enemies and this Walter Avery fired point-blank into the massive body of the old sailor. It had been such a night as this in old Mexico, hot and sticky and starry. The yellow-haired man tensed and only Drummond's warning touch on his bare arm prevented him from lunging forward to certain death.

"Miss Crewe's all right," Drummond was saying. "We ought to have remembered. That's Amana. She wouldn't stand for another woman."

Before Walter Avery, seated on a pile of yellow silk cushions was a woman—and such a woman. Even Armod, intent on other matters, gazed at her for a long time. She was lithe and strong-looking, but the fact did not deter from her essential femininity. Her face was a delicate oval and her bare arms were as soft and rounded as those of any European beauty. She was nearly as white as a European, but her great dark eyes held a fire no woman of the cold North could have possessed. She wore a silken sarong of yellow, blending perfectly with the cushions on which she sat cross-legged. At times she gesticulated with her hands and sometimes her white teeth flickered as she smiled or sneered.

Armod remembered he had heard of her, Amana, the wild half-caste Malay woman whom Avery had found starving in an up-country village and made his mistress. It was said he loved her after his fashion. It was certain, to the watchers, that she loved him. And Drummond's words were true; she was not of the breed to tolerate rivals.

Armod did not know it but a sort of half fear of her had kept Avery from Vera Crewe for a long time. Amana had threatened, indeed, and with perfect candor, that she would kill both the white girl and Avery if he so much as kissed her and she heard of it. For several weeks Avery had been trying to think out a way to rid himself of his paramour without incurring a blood-feud with her people and herself. She was related to many of the island chiefs and half of Avery's power with the natives came through her. If aroused, she could make things very awkward for her lord and master.

Three times, as Armod and Drummond

watched, natives entered the room, made some sort of report to Avery and salaamed and went away. Each time Avery's face grew more drawn and humor left him. He started to pace up and down, the woman watching his every movement. He spoke to her sharply and, taking her arm, left the room. A body servant put out the silver lamps. Room by room the house grew darker, until at last only one wing was lighted, to the right of Armod's hiding-place. The native guards seemed to have congregated on the landward side of the house, though two occasionally padded along beside the beach.

Armod slipped forward, Drummond at his heels. They went on to the deep veranda before the great main room, in shadow and blackness now, and entered the room itself through the tall open doors.

"The idea is to find where Miss Crewe is," whispered Armod. "She might be on the yacht and she might be here. I think she's here. We'll search this part of the house first."

"Aye," muttered Drummond.

In his long and varied career he had been on similar expeditions, sometimes for himself, sometimes for others. He followed Armod through a curtained doorway that led to a long cool passage onto which other curtained doorways opened. It was pitch black in the passage and they trusted mainly to their sense of touch. When they came to a curtain they drew it aside and felt if the door behind it was open or shut. The open ones they ignored; the shut ones they tested. Most were open. Against those that were locked they listened with their ears to the thin wood. Only once did they hear breathing and it was the heavy stertorous breathing of a fat man. They went on.

THE passage gave on to a sort of small hall, to the right of which a flight of broad steps led to the upper floor. Up these they went and found themselves in another hall at each end of which ran a passage with rooms opening onto it. Beneath the third locked door they noticed a thin sliver of light. It heightened their caution. Obviously the windows of the room did open onto the water-front, or Armod would have noticed them against the darkness that now obscured the remainder. He listened for a long time against the panels and caught a vague rustle, followed by a sigh.

"Vera," he whispered, greatly daring, and listened again.

After a while he scratched gently with his nails on the wood. Three times he did this before a voice answered.

"Who's there?" came tremulously.

"That's 'er," Drummond muttered excitedly.

Armod pressed the mate's arm to show he understood and as a sign to make no noise. His own heart was throbbing painfully and he was fearful lest the sound of it should be heard by some other occupant of the other rooms.

"This is Armod," he said softly.

"Armod did you say, Captain Armod?" the tremulous voice came again.

"Captain John Armod."

"I'm so glad. I've been afraid. Can you get in without them hearing you."

Armod found the door handle and turned it. The door was locked and bolted from the outside. He drew the bolt and put his shoulder against the panels to force the lock. It was stronger than he thought. He heaved abruptly and, with a splintering crash that echoed all over the house, the door gave. Armod stumbled into the room and saw Vera Crewe standing in some disarrayed white garment, leaning back against a table on which was a dimly glowing lamp.

Her face was pale and drawn and her eyes were red from weeping, but she held her head high and it was plain her spirit had not been broken. She smiled and held out her hands.

"I'm so glad—I've been afraid."

She stumbled toward him and would have fallen had not Armod caught her. Trembling, she clung to him, forgetting he was her father's enemy and was the indirect cause of her predicament. She only knew for the moment that he was some other man than Walter Avery, a foe of Avery's. Armod patted her dark hair and found he was trembling himself.

"I've come to take you away, Miss Crewe—Vera. Your father and I are friends now. I believe him, his version of my father's death. Won't you trust me?"

"I'm so glad," was all she could say. "So glad."

She was crying softly on his naked shoulder and his efforts to comfort her were clumsy and bewildered.

"Where's my father?" she faltered after a moment. "Why didn't he come?"

"He's on the schooner waiting for us." Armod did not explain what schooner and she did not ask, forgetting perhaps that she left him on a barkentine somewhere in the Java Sea.

"When you've finished I'd like to say there's 'ell t' pay," Drummond broke in with a short laugh.

Armod changed on the instant from a low-voiced quivering being holding the woman he wanted to an abrupt man of action. He let go the girl and swung round. Drummond was right. There was hell to pay, or there was going to be. Shoes clattered up flights of stairs. Someone was bawling orders in the dialect. The *pad-pad* of naked feet was plain.

Armod drew his revolver from where he had tucked it in his waistband and ran to the window. It was heavily barred and looked down over a sort of courtyard, a forty foot drop. He cursed and turned back to the door. Drummond was out in the dark passage, revolver in hand, watching toward the hallway. Armod blew out the light and caught Vera Crewe's arm.

They all went down the passage, away from the hallway.

"Is there any other way out except by the stairs?" Armod whispered to the girl.

"I don't know," she whispered back, calm enough now, remembering she was Jim Crewe's daughter with sea gypsy blood to vindicate. "I've been kept shut up."

They went to the end of the passage and found a door leading out on to an upper veranda. Drummond opened it, passed through and then gave the word the coast was clear. As they all pased out, shutting the door behind them, they heard voices and footsteps in the passage they had just left.

Drummond went on ahead, hugging close to the house in case any were watching from the grounds below, and turned a corner. He was back immediately.

"There's a hammock slung round the turn," he said. "We c'n make fast our belts to it and maybe it'll let us down."

Armod nodded and with the girl went along to where the hammock hung limp, stretched between a veranda post and a large cleat fastened in the house side. There was a good length of rope at each end and the nettles were fairly long. Rope end to rope end the thing was perhaps twenty to twenty-five feet. With the men's belts added, the length increased to thirty feet, perhaps a little more. They lowered the thing over the rail and made it fast. There would be quite a drop at the bottom end, but nothing dangerous. Drummond went down first, hand over hand, a dim blob in the darkness swaying like a crumpled canvas thing of no particular shape save that it was long and lean.

"I think I can manage it," the girl whispered.

She started down the rope and landed in a heap at Drummond's side. At the same instant Armod turned to find two natives running toward him. Behind them again, round the house corner that hid the door they had come through, could be heard other men.

Armod cursed under his breath and ducked under the first whicker of a kris. He sent the native reeling with a punch in the abdomen. The other man was on him. Armod was forced to either shoot him or take the edge of a blade in the hollow where head and shoulders meet. He shot and the sound went through all the grounds and the house like the harsh, clear bark of a hound dog. Then Armod was dropping hand over hand down the hammock and rope and had joined the other two below.

There was no hope they could get away after all that noise. Other natives were crowding the veranda above and sliding down the rope. The bushes poured men. Walter Avery appeared behind them, clearly seen in his whites, shouting directions, cursing. Armod shot at the man twice but without success. Perhaps the darkness was deceptive. Over the three whites standing below the upper veranda, with their backs to the rail of the lower, natives poured in a torrent.

"Don't kill them!" Avery called, just in time to stop murder. Helpless, they were all marched round the house and into a long, richly furnished room where an oil-lamp gave out soft lights and where Amana reclined indolently on a heap of cushions and smoked a long, black cheroot.

Avery pushed through the natives and confronted Armod.

"So you got away," he snarled. "By God, there'll be some burning villages in Borneo for that. What d'you think you can do anyway? You can't buck me. I hold the whip hand. I always hold the whip hand. Your father tried to teach me things and you know what happened to him. I'll see you don't get clear this time."

Armod gritted his teeth but said nothing. He noticed that the half-caste woman was eyeing him intently, watching first

himself and then Vera Crewe. Avery swung round on the girl.

"And I suppose you thought it was a fine thing for this damned farmer to come and take you away? I wouldn't be surprised if you hadn't hung around with him quite a bit before, in spite of all the airs you've always had. Well, I'll break you before I'm done."

Armod spoke then, calmly, though he did not feel the least calm.

"You can't do a damned thing, Avery. The game's up so far as you are concerned. The British Consul will know all about what's happened in the morning and you'll have fireworks going off under you."

"Consul, bah!" sneered Avery. "What do I care for the consul? I'm a Dutch subject now. And you didn't see the consul because I had a friend of mine call and take him to dinner. You'll never see him to tell him anything."

"You're finished, Avery," Armod went on, forcing a smile. "It doesn't matter if we don't see him. Crewe's spoken to several of his friends, given them long letters to give the consul in case anything happens to him. I've got two men combing town for him. One of us is bound to get his ear by morning or before. Once an investigation starts you're gone."

AVERY cursed. He knew, as he had known for a long time, that sooner or later he would have to get out of Java. He controlled the Dutch, it was true, by means of bribes and because he had the power to keep the natives quiet when otherwise, at times, they would have been in revolt. But it was probable that at any strong hint of international complications every official whose appointment he had secured would turn on him as readily as any man uncorrupted. He had no illusions about that and had been ready a long time.

Ever since a prau had brought news that Crewe and Avery and Cunningham and Morris had escaped he had sensed that the end was near. Unless he carried on a wholesale murder policy, with its huge risk of discovery and implication of himself, there was no way he could check his downfall.

He had till morning to make up his mind, perhaps not so long. The British consul would be kept amused for some time, but at any moment he might tire and start home. Then it was only a question of how soon someone of those seeking him got his ear. The secretary at the consulate was all right, bribed and bought body and soul, but the secretary could not stop his superior taking action. Yes, the game was about up in Batavia and the Dutch East Indies.

Everything was planned; Walter Avery was not the man to burn his boats. He had his valuables on the *Deodar*, steam was up, the crew was aboard and standing by. He would, when the crash could not be averted, gather the rest of his belongings, pay off his servants, take Vera Crewe on board and sail away, leaving Amana behind. Then for a new start with a new name and a disguised ship somewhere in the wide Pacific; perhaps in Papeete where he was little known and it was said the women were beautiful.

Yes, this was the time. Avery turned to give an order to the natives holding Armod when he caught sight of Amana watching the emotions that played over his face. He'd have to be careful she didn't guess. She was a beautiful savage tigress. She'd kill him if she knew. And about this young Armod fool and this other man with him? Would it be wise to kill them here where some trace might be left and some native might talk afterward? Doubtful.

Beter to leave them in the house, tied up, and give orders for them to be set free within forty-eight hours. He could take Vera Crewe with him and when he had tired of her he'd set her ashore and pay her passage back to Batavia. Then there'd be no excuse for old Crewe chasing after him. It was a devil of a mess. Avery for the first time realized in what a web he was involved. He believed he'd thought out the best way, but maybe something else would turn up. He snapped an order and Armod and Drummond were led away, the girl behind them.

Once outside the room where Amana reclined, the native in charge of the others gave a low command and the girl was taken through a side door that led to a path running to the beach. Armod guessed at once they were taking her to the yacht and he struggled savagely. She managed to cast one glance of despair at him, and then she was gone. Armod was jerked roughly to a room and pitched inside with Drummond on top of him. The door slammed and a bolt shot home.

Drummond cursed and sat up.

"After we was near clear away," he

grumbled. "Say, I'm getting so I don't like this Avery feller. When you get through killing him, might I 'ave a cut?"

Armod laughed despite himself.

"Aye, Drummond; we'll clean him up properly at the right time, which is God knows when. We seem to be making an awful hash of things. Now that poor girl has to go through it all again."

"She went on the yacht, didn't she?"

"I think so. It's likely, after what I told Avery about the consul, that he'll make his getaway now. That's no doubt the reason why the yacht's been keeping steam up all the time. He's been figuring something like this would break. Now he'll slip aboard after Miss Crewe, probably ditch his half-caste wife and run off to some outlandish place no one ever heard of. He's more than half crazy—I don't think there's any doubt about that."

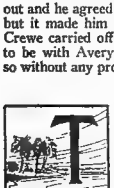
"Aye," muttered Drummond.

He groped in the pockets of his trousers and found half a plug of water-soaked tobacco. From this he bit off an enormous chew.

"We c'n only wait for the consul now, eh?" he observed.

Armod was busy circling the bare room, finding only two barred windows and a sort of sink. It would be a hard job to break out and he agreed with Drumond's remark, but it made him savage to think of Vera Crewe carried off again, perhaps this time to be with Avery away from Amana and so without any protection.

XI



HE first streaks of the dawn were lighting the sky. Armod had demolished the sink and secured a length of iron piping from it about two feet long. With this he was endeavoring to force the door when there came a gentle tapping on the panels.

"Hold up, sir," Drummond whispered. "Someone there," and Armod ceased working.

They both listened and again came the gentle tapping.

"Hello! Who's that?" Armod called softly.

With brief, harsh squeaking the bolt of the door slid back clear of the jamb; the lock grated and the door swung inward. On the threshold they could see in the half light a slender form shrouded in yellow silk. The form moved, came forward and they recognized Amana. She stood and stared Armod full in the eyes for a long minute.

"You love that white woman," she said, then, in clear English.

It was a statement more than a question, and Armod could only stare back and gasp.

The woman gestured simply.

"No matter. I know. And I think perhaps she loves you. My man took me when I was small, and I was his slave as he was mine—until he saw this white girl. He told me he did not want her, save for his business ways. Now I know better. I thought to kill her, but because you love and because I have had love myself—once—I will let her live. If you come I will give her to you."

Armod recovered from his astonishment and took a step forward.

"She's on the yacht, isn't she?" he asked.

Amana nodded and her big hot eyes were savage.

"He had her taken there, the fool. As if I am blind. As if I believed his soft words and denials. Well—" She shrugged and turned and left the room.

Armod looked at Drummond; Drummond looked at his captain. Then they both shrugged and followed the woman.

She went softly down passages and through high-ceiled rooms until, before a curtained doorway, two giant Malays stopped her. She spoke to them in the native tongue, four whip-like words, and they fell aside. Avery paid and fed them; they were true to the salt. But Amana was the daughter of a king and they knew as they had known for days, that Walter Avery's power was waning in the Indies. They knew, too, that the half-caste woman of their own race was about to be put aside, discarded, made a laughing stock among the islands. They knew just why she was entering Avery's private rooms as he was in the last of his packing. They felt it was just; Amana would run true to the code of her race.

Amana swept back the curtain and went through the open doorway beyond. Walter Avery looked up, startled, from a flat tin trunk he was trying to fasten. He was fully dressed, even to his sun-helmet, and a wallet cramped with paper money was on a low table near him. He straightened and his eyes glittered when he saw Amana.

"I thought you went up-country to visit some of your damned relations," he sneered.

Amana, being a native woman, came and went as she pleased. Avery was accus-

tomed to her abrupt return to her people at any hour when the native in her called, and her sudden determination to visit them, earlier in the evening, had seemed to fit in beautifully with his plans.

She laughed, a throbbing, full laugh that made Armod shiver a trifle, then Avery noticed the white men behind the half-caste and he snarled at her.

"Did you let them go?" he snarled at her.

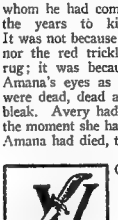
He called her a bitter name and dropped one hand to the revolver butt in his waistband. Armod started forward, but Drummond restrained him.

There was no need; he would not have reached Amana in time. She took three rapid running steps, brushed lightly against Avery, it seemed, and then drew clear.

The white man choked and swayed, dragged out the revolver and tried to fire it. Even as his finger found the trigger, blackness came to him. He toppled forward and crumpled an inert heap over the tin trunk he had been packing. Amana laughed harshly and flung from her a slender, long-bladed knife that was stained with red. She picked up the wallet of bank-notes from the table and thrust it in her sarong.

"Finish," she said bitterly. "How could a white man be faithful?" She faced Armod and Drummond. "This house is yours now for the taking, and the white girl you will find on the yacht. I go to my people and their ways again after the foolish years."

She went past them, calling to the Malay guards. They fell behind her and the trio disappeared. Armod wiped his forehead and stared at the corpse of Walter Avery, whom he had come across the world and the years to kill. And he shivered. It was not because of the body before him, nor the red trickle staining the priceless rug; it was because he had looked into Amana's eyes as she passed him. They were dead, dead and empty and infinitely bleak. Avery had died with a knife, and the moment she had sent the weapon home Amana had died, too.



VOICES echoed through the house, abruptly shattering the silence that had fallen.

"Armod, ho, Armod! Are you here?" came Captain Matthews's bellow.

Presently the captain surged into the room, behind him a slender, tall man with waxed mustaches and clear blue eyes. Behind him again a small body of police. They all stopped short when they saw what the room held.

"What happened, Armod?" Matthews asked.

"His mistress, or wife," Armod shrugged, "finished him. Jealousy. She was a good woman, I think, and justified."

Matthews dragged his eyes from the carpet and turned to the man behind him.

"This's the British consul, Captain Armod." The men shook hands. "I gave all your message and got pretty smart action."

"I've been watching Avery for a long time, Captain," said the consul, with some grimness. "He was always in some shady deal, and he had a lot of influence round here. Too much in fact. Soon as I heard Captain Matthews's story and spoke to Crewe I demanded an investigation."

"And was there any trouble?" Armod asked.

The consul's jaw tightened.

"I cabled to the Foreign Office. They filed a protest at Amsterdam. Meanwhile I was given a free hand and I sent word to Singapore for a ship of the line. She'll be here in a few days. I think you'll have a fair hearing."

"All right," said Armod. He turned to the door and pushed through the group of police. "See you later."

"Where's he going?" asked Captain Matthews.

"I guess 'e's gone on board the *Deodar*," Drummond grinned. "Can you send a coupla police in case he's refused admission? I kinda think 'e'd raise 'ell in that case an' I wouldn't want to see anyone else hurt. You see, Miss Crewe's a prisoner aboard there, and I've a notion—more than a notion—that Captain Armod——"

Drummond winked and they all laughed, understanding. The consul spoke to the police and two of them hurried after John Armod.

"And 'ow's Mr. Crewe?" Drummond wanted to know.

"All right," said Captain Matthews. "Doctor says he's lost a lot of blood but he'll pull through all right. When he knows his daughter's safe it'll help him."

"Well," said the consul, looking around, "we'd better search the house thoroughly and hold anyone we find as a witness. Where is that woman, Amana?"

"I should say she's gone back to her own country or people." Drummond chewed at his plug. "I imagine, Mr. Consul, that Captain Armod and Mr. Crewe'd rather she was listed as missing. You'll understand she was pretty 'ard 'it. And she 'ad wonderful eyes."

Drummond sighed and spat absently on the silk rug. The consul laughed and nodded and, striding to the window, looked out on the young day and on a small boat lying alongside an auxiliary steam yacht, from which a yellow-haired massive figure dressed only in rolled-up serge pants was mounting to the bigger ship's deck. The sun shimmered on the water of the wide harbor. Native craft slid to and fro. The air was cool, unstained and refreshing. Far off to seaward the white topsails of a clipper ship were growing against the blue sky.

So ended the Odyssey of John Armod, son of John Armod of Mexico and of the Armod line that ran clear back to Viking days. He sailed for years in hate and found love; he kept to one trail and found it led to happiness. He started out to kill three men and at the end his hands were unstained. He played the game as he saw it, according to his lights, and no man ever had cause to say he lacked courage or seamanship. The wide waters were his home; ships were his lovers until he found the one woman, and he gave his life to adventure as a sea gypsy should until the day when he builded his shore home and settled down to raise a son to carry on the Armod name.

THE LAST OF THE WYANDOTS

TUCKED away in the northeast corner of Oklahoma, in the neighborhood of the little village of Wyandotte, are a few hundred people of mixed Indian blood who, with some scattered families in Kansas City, Kansas, comprise the last remnants of one of the most noted tribes of Indians in all eastern North America, the Wyandots.

The history of this once formidable people is both romantic and tragic. The very first French explorers came in contact with them in 1615, when, as a numerous and warlike tribe of Iroquoian stock, they occupied their ancient home in Southern Ontario. They called themselves "Wendat," but the French, because of their bristling hair dress, termed them "Hurons," meaning literally, "Bristling Savages." They were at that time divided into a number of groups or sub-tribes, the People of the Bear, the Cord, the Rock, the Deer, the Bowl, and the Tobacco and Neuter Nations.

Because of their early friendship with the French, the latter were drawn into the deadly conflict with the Iroquois, which ended only with the downfall of the French regime in Canada and the complete destruction of the Huron confederacy. As brave and as astute as were the Huron, they were no match for the Iroquois because of their lack of cohesion, and the five united tribes from Central New York laid waste their villages, and drove them from their country or adopted them wholesale. Only a couple of small communities, now represented by the "Hurons of Indian Lorette" near Montreal, and the "Hurons of Anderdon," Ontario, surviving.

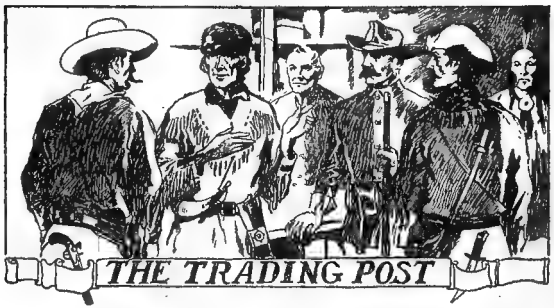
The last of the confederacy to suffer the onslaughts of the Iroquois was the Tobacco Nation, which lay farthest to the west, near Detroit. This tribe fled to the south shore of Lake Superior, where, at Chequamigon Bay, in northern Michigan, they found asylum for a time. However, they became embroiled with the Sioux, and were driven again to the neighborhood of Detroit. By this time the troubles with the Five Nations had subsided, and they were allowed to remain unmolested, for a time.

Under the name of "Wyandot," the ancient "Wendat" they formed the backbone of Pontiac's outbreak in 1763. Gradually working over to Sandusky, Ohio, they were the most determined of all the Ohio tribes during the border warfare following and preceding the American Revolution.

Driven down the Ohio they were removed first to Wyandotte—now Kansas City—Kansas, and thence to Oklahoma. It was said of them by the old chroniclers that they were conspicuous for their bravery and determination, and for their fine personal appearance.

Although much mixed with white blood, the Wyandots of today are anything but a degenerate people. They are still notable for their intelligence and their personal beauty, and rank high as American citizens.

Curiously enough, although they have nearly lost their ancient language and most of their traditions, they still, until very recently, kept up their annual "Green Corn Dance," and possess full information as to their clans and the ancient Indian names belonging to them.—A. S.



EASIER READING

THE FRONTIER aims to give you not only the best stories of the Old West, the American frontiers of all times, and the present foreign frontiers, but also to present them to you in as pleasing a manner as possible. In our illustrations as in our stories, we insist on accuracy and attention to detail. Likewise we are continually seeking ways to improve the physical make-up of the magazine, the paper and the printing.

Our experiments along this line have resulted in the adoption of a new grade of paper, which will be used beginning with the next issue. This paper, a whiter stock and of better and more expensive quality (not the calendered, or glossed, paper to which so many people object) has proved to make easier reading. Not only will the illustrations stand out more clearly when printed on it, but the text itself will be more legible and pleasing to the eye. We know you will like it.

YESTERDAY AND TODAY

HISTORY repeats itself, the great causes which have stirred men in one age reappear in the next, and the frontier incidents pictured in our stories often are reenacted today. Indeed, fiction that is founded on fact, as are our frontier stories, will often point the way and indicate the causes for present day movements. This is well indicated by the present water-rights disturbances in California.

"The Valley of Adventure," George Washington Ogden's fine story of early Californian life, which opened the first number of THE FRONTIER, has received many letters of endorsement and commendation. Many realized immediately what a realistic picture of California under the missions Mr. Ogden had drawn. It remained, however, for the past few weeks to add present-day endorsement to the graphic portrayal of the Los Angeles water situation contained in the story. Several of our readers have called to our attention the stormy scenes now being enacted in the country districts beyond Los Angeles, a present-day fighting out of a problem and feud which originated in the mission days.

In "The Valley of Adventure" Padre Ignacio and his fellow priests, conserving the water to irrigate their fields, were harassed by the citizens of the pueblo of Los Angeles, who claimed the amount coming down to them was inadequate, and that their fields were parching. In the story, the protest of the Angelenes terminated in their attempt to blow up the mission dam.

Time has changed the situation, indeed. With the eclipse and final overthrow of the missions, and with the contemporaneous flourishing of Los Angeles, the question of water rights assumed a new aspect. Today we find the ranchers and farmers, who followed the padres, declaring that *they* have insufficient water, and that *their* irrigation ditches are dry, their fields parching, because Los Angeles is taking all the water for its drinking supply. At the present writing the ranchers of Inyo County have emulated the former pueblo citizens and taken the law into their own hands, opening the sluice-gates and turning the aqueduct water back to the river and from whence it originally came.

The coincidence serves well to verify the practical reality of Mr. Ogden's story

and to demonstrate how true to life and actual conditions we aim to make all of our stories.

AS HE SAW IT

ANOTHER testimonial for the genuineness of our fiction settings arrived in a good letter from William Francis Hooker, an old-timer who knew the West in its youth and who has written several volumes of fine frontier narrative. Mr. Hooker does not mention "Good Men All," by Edwin L. Sabin, which appeared in our first number—and perhaps he has not read it. Our readers, however, will recognize quickly enough the similarity of the scene he describes and the scene in the sutler's store at Fort Ritchie, described by Mr. Sabin.

"I'm sure your Trading Post is not going to be conducted on the same lines as the one I used to patronize at Fort Fetterman on the North Platte River in the early seventies," Mr. Hooker writes. "You will have no whisky for sale; but if you did I know it would be passed out over a single bar that would be patronized by all comers, natty army officer, buck soldier, bullwhacker and muleskinner. At Fetterman Post, Trader or Sutler, as he was sometimes called, Major Tillotson had two bars, one for officers and another for the rest of us: a mere handful of citizens, and the buck soldiers who dared to drink in the presence of the officers. The two bars were divided by a white-washed line drawn across the floor, and the quality of whisky was different on either side of the line."

Recognize the "white line" which made all the trouble between Private Peters and Lieutenant Ransom in "Good Men All?"

Mr. Hooker goes on to give us some interesting information about a very interesting organization, "The Society of Plainsmen," making its headquarters in New York. THE FRONTIER will have a special appeal for old-timers, for plainsmen and mountaineers, for men who saw the Old West grow up and had a part in the glorious task of building it up to its present greatness; and we want to make it their magazine. If you know of a local organization in your neighborhood such as "The Society of Plainsmen"—or any band of old-timers—we shall be very glad to hear of it. The more of these organizations with which we can get in touch the more thoroughly we can get back into old Western history, the wider we can open the doors to the almost boundless stock of trail and plains lore, and the better stories we can give you. Let us know about your local old-timers. Returning to Mr. Hooker:

"'The Society of Plainsmen' right here in New York has in its membership such men as Edmund Seymour, Wall Street banker, former Wyoming cowboy, who is treasurer; Colonel George W. Stokes, who hauled the first load of ore out of the Black Hills to a Denver mint, president; A. H. Baiseley, bullwhacker on the Santa Fe Trail; M. S. Garretson, secretary of the Bison Society of America; Major A. B. Ostrander, soldier at Wyoming garrisons; and the subscriber, who was a bullwhacker on the old Cheyenne, Medicine Bow and Sidney trails. So we have army men and the bullwhackers, muleskinners, et al together after all these years, and they eat together and drink soda water at least once a year, and have forgotten the distinctions that were made in those early rough days, for now they realize that after all we were pioneering together, each doing his share in making the Wild West tame and gentle, and pushing the frontier into the Pacific and across the border to the north."

WITH CROCKETT IN TEXAS

DAN BEARD, who contributed to our last Trading Post that entertaining item about Louis Philippe of France and his American flatboating experience, offers another bit of exceedingly interesting history which, as he points out, probably he alone can pass on for recording.

In those stirring days when Davy Crockett with his gun Betsy, his recruit, the gambling thimble-rigger, and his romantic friend the bee hunter, had volunteered to help the Texans, the sympathy of all the people of the Ohio and Mississippi Valley were with them," writes Mr. Beard. "Groups and companies of men were volunteering from Kentucky, and Hon. David T. Disney, Congressman by unanimous vote, increased his popularity by helping the filibuster with arms. The company of Kentuckians wanted a flag under which to fight, and with that project in mind came to James H. Beard, the artist who had painted the portraits of all the prominent men from Lake Erie to the mouth of the Mississippi. Mr. Beard painted them a flag, if I remember aright, on a blue silk background showing the goddess of liberty with sword held aloft from which streamed a scroll with the slogan, 'Liberty or Death.' It was, I believe, in Newport, Kentucky, that these young men were

marching through the street with their new banner flying when a lady tossed her glove to them from a window of a residence as they were passing. With the gallantry of the times, one of the young Kentuckians picked up the glove, kissed it and placed it on top of the banner.

"I made inquiries for some time and tried to locate this flag, but no one living in Kentucky or Cincinnati knew anything about it. Later I got in communication with the State Librarian of Texas, and was informed by him that there was a banner corresponding with my description, also a glove, but on account of the condition of the banner, being tattered and torn, and being under glass, it could not be examined in detail. The letter also stated that the origin of this flag was unknown to the Texans; neither did they know why the glove happened to be there on the staff.

"This blue banner and glove was the one they fought under at the battle of San Jacinto.

"The two cannon, 'The Twin Sisters,' furnished by David T. Disney, are still preserved in Texas. Sam Houston, Colonel James Bowie, Stephen F. Austin, were personal friends of Mr. Beard, while Davy Crockett was an acquaintance whom he first met on the levee at Cincinnati.

"My uncle, David T. Disney, died before my memory. My father, James H. Beard, crossed the Great Divide where all pony tracks point one way, in 1893. Therefore, there is probably no one left but me to contribute this little bit of history."

PETTICOAT PIRATES

QUITE removed from the Chisholm Trail are the uncharted trails which Bart Skyrm and his pirate crew followed. Yet theirs was a frontier even more wild and hazardous than our old West. Hardly the sort of place in which one would expect to find women, yet Eugene Cunningham's story, "Petticoat Marooners," in this issue, is not entirely fiction.

"As very possibly you know," Mr. Cunningham writes, "there really were two noted women pirates, or 'marooners,' as these worthies came to be called in the early 18th century: Mary Reed, of whom 'Kit' is pretty much a portrait, and Anne Bonny, the daughter of a Carolina lawyer. Anne eventually married a Captain Backham, or so the old chronicler says. Both women were captured; Anne was pardoned, but Mary died of fever while awaiting execution.

THE KILLING OF SAM BLAKEMAN

ANOTHER story in this issue, based largely on fact, is "The Killing of Same Blakeman," by Fred Hunt. Fact enough, at any rate, for Mr. Hunt to smell the powder smoke!

"'The Killing of Sam Blakeman' is based to some extent on fact; of course fact distorted and badly twisted," says Mr. Hunt. "Last summer I was close enough to see the smoke from the weapons when an acquaintance of mine, a city policeman and veteran peace officer, was instantly killed in a gun-fight that was worthy of Texas tradition in its colorfulness. It did sound just like a pneumatic riveter when an old .45 and an automatic began spitting.

"My life thus far has not been particularly crowded with interesting adventure. Twenty-eight years old, did about five years at two universities; another five years in newspaper work as reporter, sports editor and marine editor; two years at sea in sailing vessels, mostly gulf fishing schooners. A bad optic kept me out of the war, my greatest regret. Quit my job as marine editor of the Galveston *Tribune* last month to go a-roving. Am scheduled to leave here shortly on Shipping Board steamer as seaman. Expect to spend a year or so either in Spain or the West Indies."

EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

"PETTICOAT MAROONERS" is not the first of Mr. Cunningham's stories we have published in THE FRONTIER, nor will it be the last. Beginning with the next issue we shall also publish a series of short and highly interesting articles on "The Beginnings of Our Towns." Mr. Cunningham is particularly well equipped to gather the data for these articles, and he presents each of them most entertainingly. In each case one of the local city organizations has read and endorsed the articles as an added assurance that the facts are all correct.

"I'm Southern by birth and Scotch-English ancestry, of no earlier vintage than the 'Nineties. Educated in the public schools of Dallas and Fort Worth," Cunningham introduces himself.

"In the Texas of my day the bronc had not been replaced by the Ford. There were all sorts of interesting men to listen to; two-gun ex-marshals left over from the Smoky Seventies; Confederate veterans; cowpunchers; racehorse men. But even the colorful chaos of the stockyards

couldn't outweigh the lure of foreign parts, so I slipped away to be a bold sailorman.

"In the Navy, by reading and study, but best of all by contact with the thousands of all sorts of men one was thrown with, my real education and writing began. Most of my stories were hot out of life, picked up on deck as I walked. In the summer of 1919 I planned to leave the Service and begin a real writing-campaign, but restlessness took me to Central America as magazine correspondent. Horseback and afoot, with a photographer friend, I covered the back-blocks from Costa Rica to Guatemala. Came home and began to pound out travel-articles, travel-books, fiction long and short. Still at it and hope to continue; it's the hardest, most interesting game I know."

THE MAIL POUCH

JUST as the modern Pony Express rider drops the pouch on our desk, so these letters come to you. An old frontiersman leads off:

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:

I am writing to say that THE FRONTIER is a dandy bit of reading, and will fill a long felt want.

I am one of the frontiersmen, being born in Idaho, more than fifty years ago, and have spent my whole life in the West, on the frontier of the good old U. S. A. among the cattle, mine and logging camps, and it surely does me good to see a magazine like THE FRONTIER launched. I surely hope that it meets with the success that it deserves.

It is a laudable undertaking, to give to the world facts, even if there is some fiction sandwiched along between the said facts. I would like to see a lot of reading about the old South-west, and the Northern wilds, as there are enough facts in those two sections to build foundations for the Frontier for a long time to come.

W. K. DYCHE,
Kirkford, Oregon.

Courtney Ryley Cooper, well known to all fiction readers, has a word to say:

You've made a peach of a magazine of THE FRONTIER and I think it's going to jump right into favor. I'm intensely enthusiastic about it.

Best of luck.

COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER,
Idaho Springs, Colorado.

An ex-cowboy, who finds THE FRONTIER bringing back memories of the days that are past:

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:

The appearance of THE FRONTIER gave me real pleasure as the Old West has always had an appeal for me. I spent some seven years in the Forest Service in the far Western states and also did some cowpunching prior to that in south-eastern Utah.

Success to THE FRONTIER. It is good reading and should find an enthusiastic market.

Yours truly,

JOHN RHS,
Richmond, Va.

This reader found the second FRONTIER just as good as the first:

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:

I read every letter in the entire first issue of THE FRONTIER. Being an inveterate reader I sometimes get tired of the regular run of books, but THE FRONTIER is so different and delightful that I mean to read every issue. I have just finished the second issue and is everything the editor claimed it to be.

Sincerely,
(Miss) ELIZABETH KRUISWYK,
Dawes, Alabama.

THE NEXT FRONTIER

IN "GILA JOE," which will open the next issue of THE FRONTIER, Anthony M. Rud has given us a gripping novel of the Southwest—of Gila Joe, before whose gun more than one notorious killer went down; of old Stephen Lassiter, with his foot-long Spracklin .50; of Cuss-em-out Crandall, veteran stagecoach driver—and of a host of others whom you will come to know and remember. "Red Knives," a long novelette by Ernest Haycox, will change the scene from the West to the East. It lays a fine story around old Detroit, Vincennes and Kaskaskia, when that territory was an Indian-infected frontier. With Clark the story goes into the Northwest Territory to capture it for the warring Colonies.

L. Patrick Greene will be there with another good novelette of frontier life in Rhodesia. Edward Parrish Ware will spin a novelette-length yarn of the very interesting Sunken Land country of Arkansas—of the native swamp-rats and of the pioneering wagon-trains bringing in settlers.

Talbot Mundy, well known for his great stories of Africa, India and the other far places of the world, will present a vivid picture of frontier Africa in his article, "On the Trail of Sindbad the Sailor." Mr. Mundy spent years in frontier Africa and is splendidly equipped to portray the many obstacles which confronted white pioneers in the Dark Continent.

Among the short story contributors will be James B. Hendryx, with a fine story of the Old West, "The Winning of Cincinnati McQueen." James K. Waterman will have another story of the Sea Fox; Barry Scobee will be on hand with another pioneering tale—and there will be others.

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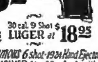

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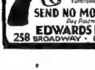

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The Letter That Saved Bob Johnson's Job

—and paved the way for a better one!

IT was written to his employer by the International Correspondence Schools. It told how "Robert Johnson had enrolled for a course of home-study and had received a mark of 94 for his first lesson."

Bob answered the summons to the Chief's office with just a little fear and trembling, for a lot of men were being dropped—a lot more were having their pay reduced.

But as Bob came in, his employer did a surprising thing. He got up quickly from his desk and grasped Bob warmly by the hand.

"I want to congratulate you, young man, on the marks you are making with the I. C. S. I am glad to see that you are training yourself not only for your present job but for the job ahead.

"We're cutting the pay-roll. Until I received this letter, I had you in mind as one of the men to be dropped. But not now. Keep on studying—keep your eyes open—and pretty soon there'll be a still better job for you around here. We're always looking for trained men."

Won't you let the I. C. S. help you, too? Won't you trade a few hours of your spare time for a good job, a good salary and the comforts that go with it? Then mark the work you like best on the coupon below and mail it to Scranton today. That doesn't obligate you in the least, but it will be your first big step towards success. *Do it now!*

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Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

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- ☐ Salesmanship
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- ☐ Show Card Lettering
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
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TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

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- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
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- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
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- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Automobile Work
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No picture can do justice to this beautiful dinner set. I want you to see it on your own table. I want you to know the Attractiveness of its Aristocratic Colonial Shape, the Beauty of its refined Gold Border and Orange band. I want you to see how the big, wide, brilliant gold handles enrich and beautify the set. Then I want you to know the Pride of Possessing a high-class dinner set that has your initial on every piece. I will send you the entire set, on **30 Days' Free Trial.** The picture shows, in reduced size, the attractive initial design. This design is in 7 harmoniously blended colors and gold. SUPREME QUALITY. Everything that high class materials, manufacturing skill, art and design can do, has been done to make this beautiful Dinnerware a Remarkable Bargain. All the decorations, the initial, the wreath, the scroll of roses in natural colors, the gold edge, and the inner line of orange, are absolutely put on to stay. We guarantee against breakage in shipment. **Each piece wrapped separately in tissue paper.**

110 PIECES

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This dinner set formerly sold for $44.75 and without the Free Table Cloth and Napkins. You would have been satisfied to pay this price for the High Quality and Exquisite Design of this set Alone.

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I want to send you the 110 pieces on 30 Days' Free Trial to use as your own. If your satisfaction is not complete, return the set. I will refund your first payment and all freight charges. The trial will not cost you a penny.
Be careful to state the initial you desire. Order No. SA2920. Price $29.95. Terms $1.00 with order; balance $2.50 Monthly.

THE 110 PIECES

12 9¾-in. Dinner Plates, 12 7¾-in. Pie or Lunch Plates, 12 6¾-in. Bread and Butter Plates, 12 7¾-in. Soup Plates, 12 Cups, 12 Saucers, 12 5¾-in. Dessert Dishes, 12 6-in. Oatmeal Dishes, 1 Covered Vegetable Dish (2 Pieces), 1 8-in. Open Vegetable Dish, 1 10½-in. Meat Platter, 1 13½-in. Meat Platter, 1 9¾-in. Round Salad Dish, 1 Sauce Boat, 1 Sauce Boat Stand, 1 Gravy Bowl, 1 Covered Sugar Bowl (2 Pieces), 1 Cream Pitcher, 1 6-in. Pickle Dish, 1 7-in. Butter Dish.

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Nathaniel Spear
President

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